



**deiou**  
FOUNDATION  
for children with autism

# Resilience through change

**Annual Report**  
2020-2021





# Contents

Acknowledgment of Country	1
Welcome	2
About AEIOU	3
What is autism?	4
Message from the Chair	6
Message from the Chief Executive Officer	7
Our year at a glance	8
A snapshot on intake	10
Enhancing our service model	11
Advocating for children with autism	12
A one-stop wonder: Ethan finally says “I Love You”	13
Everyone matters: Statement of inclusion	14
Meet our people	16
Supporting a resilient team	18
Improving accessibility to fire safety	19
Developments in research	20
Messages from our families	22
Our supporters	24
Our leadership	25
Our governance structure	26
Financial Summary	28

# Acknowledgment of Country

AEIOU Foundation acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation and the continuation of cultural, spiritual and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In the spirit of reconciliation, we are committed to educating the children in our care about the living culture, history and achievements of First Nations peoples by embedding a genuine culture and learning framework in our centres.



Our centres operate on unceded land belonging to the Kurna people (Adelaide), the people of Ngunnawal country (Canberra), Bundjalung country (Gold Coast), the Turrbal and Yuggera people (Nathan, Logan, Camira, Bald Hills), the Jagera and Giabal people of Barunggam country (Toowoomba), the Gubbi Gubbi people (Sippy Downs), the Taribelang, Kabi-Kabi, Batjala and Waka-Waka people of Gureng Gureng country (Bundaberg), the people of Gugu-Badhun country (Townsville).

# Welcome

AEIOU Foundation is recognised for delivering an effective integrated service comprising care, education and therapeutic support from a single convenient location. We work in a dynamic environment, with an ever-present need to adapt, particularly in times of major reform, such as the introduction of the NDIS.

When change challenges us, we're backed by a spirit of determination and a strong future focus. AEIOU has a track record of effective advocacy for quality supports and appropriate funding for children on the spectrum.

Unwavering throughout the years has been our commitment to best supporting young children with autism and their families through the early years of an autism diagnosis.

Today, our service operates across 11 centres in Queensland, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory and provides essential support to hundreds of Australian families.

## Our Reporting Process:

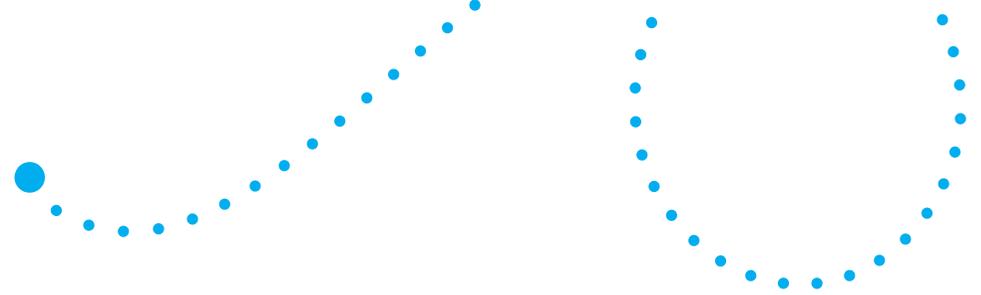
This is the 12th annual report published by AEIOU, documenting the financial, operational and community performance for the financial year ending 30 June 2021. Feedback is welcome and can be emailed to [feedback@aeiou.org.au](mailto:feedback@aeiou.org.au).



“What I would say to a child at AEIOU is you have a bright future ahead of you, you are going to accomplish great things, if you work hard enough on those goals, you will be able to achieve them.”

– Oliver, aged 19, former student

# About AEIOU



This financial year, we provided support to **493 children** and their families.

Most children enrolled at AEIOU have been diagnosed with **Level 2 and Level 3** autism.

**98.5%** of children improved their overall communication skills, and the average improvement in auditory comprehension after one year at AEIOU was **11 months**.

**95.4%** of children improved their visual reception skills after one year at AEIOU.

**96.9%** of children improved their fine motor skills after one year at AEIOU.

AEIOU employs **373** Team members, including **274** permanent and fixed-term employees.

AEIOU operates **11** early intervention centres, including: Bald Hills, Bundaberg, Camira, Gold Coast, Logan, Nathan, Sippy Downs, Toowoomba and Townsville in Queensland, Adelaide in South Australia, and Canberra Region in the ACT.

## Our Vision

Children with autism living their best lives.



## Our Purpose and Mission Statement

To enhance the lives of children with autism and their families, through evidence-based, successful early intervention programs and practical support.

## Our Values

### Support

You can rely on AEIOU for expert guidance and a commitment to each member of the Foundation's family.



### Teamwork

A collaborative, inclusive team working together to create bright futures.



### Excellence

Driven to be the best, we are leaders in the delivery of quality, evidence-based early intervention.



### Passion

We're inspired by the difference we are making in young lives. We love what we do.



## Our Philosophy

We believe children:



- Have a right to early intervention
- Benefit from therapy based on individual needs
- Learn using different learning styles and at different rates
- Are individuals, with differing personalities, needs, wants, interests and levels of ability
- Require flexible routines in their daily program to cater for their individual needs
- Should receive evidence-based early intervention and access to appropriate assessment
- Are entitled to a balanced program that bridges the gap between the home, AEIOU Foundation and the community
- And can benefit from families and staff working together.

# What is autism?

Autism is a neurological developmental disorder. It is lifelong, and according to research published in *The Open Paediatric Medicine Journal* (2012), is diagnosed in 1 in 100 Australians.

More recent studies indicate a higher prevalence, affecting 1 in 70 people. (Autism Awareness Australia, 2021).

There's a saying in our community: *when you know one person with autism, you know one person with autism*. Autism affects everyone differently, but people with autism often share challenges in two main areas:

- **Social interaction and social communication**, including decoding body language and verbal communication, reciprocal conversation, emotional and social reciprocity, and managing structured parts of the day;
- **Restrictive and repetitive patterns of behaviours or interests**, including rituals and routines, and experiencing hyper- or hypo-sensitivity to sensory input.

At least 1 in 100 Australians are diagnosed with autism (The Open Paediatric Medicine Journal, 2012).



In 2018, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported there are **205,200 Australians with autism** – an increase from 164,000 in 2015.



**Males** are diagnosed with autism more often than females (ABS, 2018). This difference may be due to how characteristics of autism differ between males and **females** and how the diagnosis process considers these.



It is common for people with autism to have **additional medical disorders**, often immunological, neurological and gastroenterological. (Muskens et al., 2017).



**Early intervention** increases the likelihood a child will develop the **functional communication, social and independent living skills** that will create a better chance for meaningful participation in the community, including at school or work.





“AΞIOU made me who I am. I think my earliest memories of my life have been with AΞIOU. I first learned how to ride a bike there...it’s where I first started socialising and meeting new people. I liked it a lot there... AΞIOU made me feel happy about who I am.”

– Joey, aged 20, former student

# Message from the Chair

**This year has been transformative for AEIOU. There have been large-scale changes across our sector in recent years, and as with all journeys of growth, this has brought a level of discomfort.**

Like many disability service providers, we needed to respond swiftly to rapid changes proposed by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) while maintaining a strong focus on the quality of our service and the needs of the children and families accessing AEIOU.

Independent Assessments received a great deal of airtime in the media this year, and rightly so. Less known were the challenges being faced in the Early Childhood Early Intervention space.

Our primary focus was to secure the sustainability of our core service offering, an evidence-based program designed to support vulnerable children who are typically excluded or failing to thrive in mainstream settings.

We had a small window of opportunity to update our service model, and I am pleased with the resulting uplift in the quality of our service. From July 2021, we will have made a full transition from a group funding model to an individualised model of service and accountability. This is another step toward a more market-led model of service.

While working hard to understand the changes coming to the sector in rapid succession and to adjust our service accordingly, attention to a strong uplift in advocacy has been essential.

This year, AEIOU families were particularly concerned about plan values and long-term access to reasonable and necessary supports. We continue to engage with senior NDIS officials and federal ministers to share our concerns about the impacts of proposed NDIS changes. We do this because while there are many voices which represent autism, there are few who do so in the early childhood space.

All the while, we have continued to work towards the goals set in our three-year strategic blueprint, strengthening our capability to innovate and diversify our services long-term.

As we embark on a new fiscal year, we are part-way through a phase of maturation which has impacted every person employed at AEIOU, and every family engaged in our programs.

I'd like to acknowledge the efforts of our CEO and executive team, who have worked tirelessly to lead the Foundation through these changes. I also thank our people, and the families who choose AEIOU as their partner. AEIOU's Board of Directors also deserve special mention for giving their time to help guide this organisation. I look forward to our next phase of development in 2022.

Sincerely,

**Susan Rix, AM**  
Chair



# Message from the Chief Executive Officer

Walt Disney said, 'times and conditions change so rapidly that we must keep our aim constantly focused on the future'. He was right. It is impossible to resist change, we must embrace it – and that's exactly what we have done at AEIOU this year.

We had less than 12 months to steer a large ship into a new port – made more interesting by the unusual times we find ourselves in, living and working within a global pandemic.

NDIS changes also meant we needed to address our service model and billing structure. We used this opportunity to introduce greater individualisation, accountability and better support for the children in our service. We also wanted to enhance the working environment of our team with these changes, recognising that their work is unique, and more challenging than many realise.

As with all major projects, we learned a great deal along the way.

Our people stepped up, accepting new portfolios, and learned new facets of this business, working together to navigate the new territory we find ourselves in.

Families attending AEIOU centres shared our concern regarding signals sent by the NDIS regarding early childhood early intervention. In droves they reached out to their local MPs and the NDIS Minister, advocating for their children and others like them. We have begun to achieve some traction with the Australian Government and the NDIS, but there is more work to be done.

Despite challenges, we also achieved major milestones. Construction on the new AEIOU Canberra Region Centre is complete, with children enrolled for July 2021. The John James Foundation, our partners, demonstrated incredible vision and commitment to families in the ACT through this project, and I commend their Directors and CEO.

As we move into the new financial year, we will spend some time adjusting to Phase One of our new service model while training and supporting our team and families. Next, we plan to enhance the scope of our service. The future we see for AEIOU is one which can cater to the unique, individual needs of many families.

One thing which is a constant at AEIOU is the level of support we receive from our community. I thank the donors who have remained loyal friends of the Foundation. It has been marvellous to host events in the community again, with our Gala Ball a recent highlight, and a record event in Take a Hike in Toowoomba this year.

This year's standout is our team: the heart of AEIOU. Working through change and on the frontline during a global health pandemic is not easy. I am always heartened by their commitment to the children in our care and to our cause despite the difficult times.

Our Board of Directors has also been part of our learning journey this year, providing guidance and support at every step.

Change and growth is a certainty and must be embraced. We have a strong foundation to manage this here at AEIOU, and I look forward to the year ahead.

Sincerely,

**Alan Smith**  
Chief Executive Officer



# Our year at a glance

## July 2020

- **Mason attends his first birthday party; his speech, emotional regulation and play skills have improved since joining AEIOU.**



## September

- After extensive renovations, AEIOU Toowoomba, also known as the AEIOU Rhonda Greensill Centre, re-opens.

## November

- A pilot program to enhance our service model commences in Townsville and Camira.



## January 2021

- Our pilot study shows children in Townsville and Camira master skills at an increased rate.
- Planning commences to rollout an enhanced service model for all AEIOU centres.

## December

- AEIOU's first digital-only fundraising campaign raises over \$390,000.



## October

- **Levi is comfortable putting his socks, shoes and hat on independently for the first time.**



## August

- To ensure our teams and families know the latest regulations and policies, we launch a COVID-19 Info Hub.



- We celebrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture during NAIDOC Week.
- AEIOU's Central Office team returns to Woolloongabba after three months of working from home due to COVID-19.



## February

- Jaxon transitions to his next educational environment and makes a new friend in Prep.

## April

- AEIOU celebrates World Autism Awareness Month with some well-known Australians.
- Queensland Fire & Emergency Services (QFES) collaborate with AEIOU to introduce an autism-specific fire education program for young children on the spectrum.



## May

- AEIOU Chair Susan Rix and CEO Alan Smith meet Hon. Linda Reynolds, Minister for the NDIS regarding impacts of proposed changes to early childhood early intervention funding.



## June

- Our enhanced service model begins to roll out in centres.
- \$110,000 is raised at the 2021 AEIOU Gala Ball.



## March

- Three incredible mums organise an A-list event raising \$40,000 for AEIOU.
- The NDIS proposes new funding brackets, demonstrating a potential to cap plans for children with autism at half the current value.



- A record-breaking year on all fronts: over 300 people raise \$58,000 during Take A Hike Toowoomba.



- AEIOU issues a joint statement with the Australian Autism Alliance speaking out against Independent Assessments.
- A local artist puts the finishing touches to a mural at our soon-to-be-complete Canberra Region Centre.



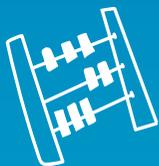
# A snapshot on intake

At AEIOU, all children are assessed upon intake using a variety of international, standardised assessment tools, including the Mullen Scales of Early Learning Assessment, the Vinelands Adaptive Behaviour Scales and the Preschool Language Scale. This year's intake data shows us:



## 1 year 7 months

The average age of a parent's first concern that their child was not developing typically.



**3 years 1 month** – The average age of AEIOU children at the time of diagnosis (though ranging from 1 year, 4 months to 5 years, 2 months).

**38% of children at AEIOU had a Level 2 diagnosis** and 43% had a Level 3 diagnosis (5% had a Level 2-3 diagnosis, and 2% did not have a level provided at diagnosis).

**80%** of children were either **not yet toilet trained** or were struggling in their toilet training.

**42%** had or sometimes had unusual sleeping habits (e.g. trouble getting to sleep, waking frequently, waking early).

**26% of children had a co-diagnosis**, the most common being 'Global Developmental Delay (GDD)'.  
**3 years 11 months** – The average age of children when commencing with us.

**150 children enrolled** at an AEIOU centre during this financial year.

**921 assessments** were conducted for children across our services.



Our families hail from **35 different countries**, including Afghanistan, Colombia, Fiji, Ireland, Libya, Nepal, Russia, Wales and Zimbabwe.



**164 families received fee relief** to support their attendance, made possible with support from COVID-19 subsidies and direct support from AEIOU with dedicated fundraising programs.

**177 children transitioned** into their next learning environment this year.



# Enhancing our service model

This year is defined by service refinement, with major impacts to how we operate inside and outside the classroom.

We have managed these changes amidst a pandemic, which comes with personal and professional impacts. It's during these challenges that we grow as people and as leaders, and we have been witness to the strong community spirit that binds our team and families together.

The need to review how we operate was first identified in 2019, as the NDIS completed its rollout across Australia. We began investigating how to address opportunities in early 2020, before our attention turned to our COVID-19 pandemic response.

When the NDIS removed the group therapy line item from its price guide without warning in July 2020, AEIOU advocated for an extension; permission was granted to extend this method of service delivery and associated billing arrangements for families to 1 July 2021.

Our aim has always been to approach this process with distinct priorities: to better support our centre-based team, each child in our care and their families, and to meet federal legislative reforms. We consulted with families and team members to make these important changes, as well as advocating to external agencies.

Changes often bring uncertainty, disruption and challenges and we worked hard not only to reduce impacts for families, but also to support our people.

We conducted a pilot in a mid-size and a large centre and studied the outcomes over a period of three months. We discovered the proposed changes supported children to make gains more quickly and improved engagement with families overall.

Ideally, these kinds of changes would be implemented over 18 months to two years, but this work was under pressure from a changing NDIS. There is still work to be done, and improvements to be made, but there is good progress.

What we've been touched by during this time has been an unprecedented level of support from the AEIOU community. So many team members have shared stories of collaboration, kindness and appreciation during this time. It's how people work together and support one another through transitions that show a community's power.

Through reforms to the NDIS and our dedication to supporting children with autism better, we're committed to supporting the individual needs of each child in our service, as well as our teams implementing the program.

The official rollout across our centres takes place on July 5, 2021. We look forward to a promising future for our service model and even better outcomes for the children at AEIOU.

## Changes we're achieving

- > **Better outcomes for the children in our care:** that means smaller groups, with children working in pairs, trios and one-to-one. Children spend more time working towards individual goals, with a stronger focus on early education, and additional supports in the community and at home
- > **A better workplace environment for our team,** with higher staff to child ratios, and a goal to reduce burnout and risk of workplace injuries
- > **Better partnerships with families,** helping them develop skills to support their child's therapy at home and beyond AEIOU
- > **Future opportunities for families to have greater flexibility** and more visibility around outcomes for their child

## What is not changing

- > The unique relationship between 'service delivery' as early childhood education and care, and 'clinical delivery' as autism-specific early intervention therapies
- > Our focus on high-quality programming
- > Our focus on evidence-based interventions to assist children in their development journey
- > Our transdisciplinary approach to achieve holistic outcomes for children and their families
- > Our purpose: To enhance the lives of children with autism and their families, through evidence-based, successful early intervention programs and practical support

# Advocating for children with autism

We've always played a strong role in connecting families with funding and advocating for appropriate government support for children with autism, making sure they can access critical services to support their growth and development no matter their family's financial situation.

When the Australian Government released the first federal funding package, Helping Children with Autism, in 2008, we were thrilled. When the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was being put together, our Board spoke up for the needs of children with autism and their families.

The NDIS hasn't had a completely smooth rollout, but it is undeniably a tremendously positive development for all Australians. It's one of the rare initiatives that can boast commitment from both sides of politics and is the largest social policy change since the introduction of Medicare. We should all be proud that our country provides a national safety net for people with disabilities and their families.

As the Scheme matures, amendments and changes are to be expected. However, the Early Childhood Early Intervention Reset consultation paper issued by the NDIS in November 2020, and the 'Interventions for children on the autism spectrum' consultation paper (March 2021), contained some unsettling signals indicating how funding could be changed for children with autism. A dramatic reduction in funds for families who currently access intensive pathways of support (such as that offered by AEIOU) was proposed. The rationale behind the proposal appeared to be that parents could provide early intervention of an equivalent value to trained clinicians, and that the NDIS should not fund care provided by family.

We recognised that this approach was not yet policy; that the NDIS was still in a consultation period. We also recognised

our responsibility to AEIOU families. If these proposed changes went ahead, there would be harmful impacts for parents, team members and – most importantly – the children we care for. It was vital that we spoke up while there was still time to turn the decision around.

Our team wrote pages in response to consultation papers, sharing the impacts proposed changes would have for children's futures. We reached out to our contacts at the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), who manage the NDIS. We invited families to share their concerns by writing to their local MP. Some families also wrote to NDIA CEO Martin Hoffman, explaining why early childhood early intervention should continue to be funded fairly and fully.

Along with the families who spoke up, we'd like to acknowledge the tremendous support that NSW Senator Hollie Hughes has provided on this issue. Senator Hughes is Chair of the Senate Select Committee on Autism and proud mother of an 11-year-old son with autism. She has been instrumental in helping our voice be heard in Canberra.

AEIOU's Board and leadership team worked hard to secure meetings with senior NDIA decision-makers, and politicians, including NDIS Minister Hon Linda Reynolds CSC. At the time of going to print, we're confident the NDIS has heard our voice, and that an intensive level of support for children who require it will continue to be funded.

We will always speak up for our families, and we will continue to collaborate with the NDIS - working together to shape a financially sustainable Scheme into the future, while providing support that will set up children with autism to live their best lives.



# A one-stop wonder: **Ethan finally says** “I Love You”

Four-year-old Ethan Haskings finally says the words every parent wants to hear: “I love you”, thanks to what his parents describe as a “one stop wonder”: AEIOU.

Mum Gemma and dad Lee are extremely proud and delighted by the progress Ethan has made in speech, toileting, and behaviour since joining our service in January 2021.

“The contrast between when Ethan first started to now couldn’t be any greater. Our life with Ethan was a daily challenge, he was non-verbal, having regular tantrums, and developing much more slowly compared to his peers – it was agonising to watch and especially frustrating for him,” said Gemma.

“Lee and I felt like the only people in the entire world who could understand Ethan. We had our own way of communicating with him, but we knew it wasn’t enough. We needed help. We needed Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Behaviour Therapists and on top of that, day care!

“There was no way we could manage taking Ethan to 20 – 25 hours of therapy per week, we both work full time – but you’ll do anything for your child, especially knowing how critical early intervention is, so of course we considered it. Then we found AEIOU – the one stop wonder.”

“To have all of Ethan’s therapy in one place has been a game changer. In just eight months, Ethan’s communication, toileting, and behaviour skills have developed significantly. To hear those three little words: “I love you” and to watch Ethan playing and having conversations with his brother is further from where we thought we’d be. I don’t feel worried about the future anymore.”





# Everyone matters:

## Statement of inclusion

Each day, we seek to discover and encourage the best in others: in the children we care for, in the families we partner with, and in the team who make it all happen.

**We are committed to an inclusive and diverse culture.** A culture which recognises, celebrates, and honours each person's strengths as part of our AEIOU community.

At AEIOU Foundation, we welcome the unique contributions each person brings to our community. **Regardless of who you are, AEIOU is a place to belong.**

To help foster this environment and respond to emerging priorities, our human resources team has taken on greater responsibilities, reflected in a new name: People, Culture and Safety.

One of their first priorities was to empower our team with the skills to build a fair, supportive and inclusive workforce because we recognise it's our people at the heart of our service.



# Meet our people

It brings us great joy at AEIOU to be able to recognise our dedicated and passionate team for their commitment to the children in our care. Our values of **Support, Teamwork, Excellence** and **Passion** guide our people to go 'the extra STEP' in their day-to-day work.

Many have been part of AEIOU for years and have grown with our organisation. Here, we share in some of their wonderful stories.

## Enia Alberto

*Regional Manager,  
Canberra, 3 years' service*



"I joined the AEIOU family in 2018 when I moved from freezing cold Boston, Massachusetts to hot, sunny Townsville, Queensland. Now as Regional Manager for our Canberra Region service, I've been lucky enough to be part of a major project with the construction of a new AEIOU centre. I've also recruited and trained a specialist team and prepared to welcome the first families to our brand-new service. But my favourite moments are the small ones: celebrating 2 four-year-old boys happily sharing in a game with each other after they started at the centre with no cooperative play skills. What a journey it's been! Over the past three years, the organisation has evolved so much. But what's never changed is the passion and dedication the team bring to supporting each child and their families."

## Sarah Sword

*Service Team Leader,  
6 years' service*



"In 2015, I was working in a long day care setting and, on the side, I was a passionate advocate requesting support for children I could see were missing out on opportunities to fulfil their potential. When I saw an AEIOU ad, I jumped at the opportunity to work here. Since then, I've worked as a learning facilitator, room leader, a centre manager (at three centres) and now I'm a Team Lead in the Service Delivery department. I've worked through three major changes: way back when we introduced AEIOU's specific curriculum to guide teaching and goal setting for the children, a growing focus on support and supervision for front-line teams through the Program Coordinator and Service Delivery Teams, and more recently changes to our service model. All of these changes were big adjustments, but they increased the quality of the service we provide and saw wonderful increases in the children's skills development and progress. Even on tough days, there's joy in sharing in a child's success: when they independently request a toy for the first time or seek you out for play. Change can be tough, but what keeps me going on a tough day is being a part of the AEIOU journey."





### Phillipa Allen

*Early Childhood Teacher,  
Gold Coast, 5 years' service*



"Our line of work can be complex and challenging, but I've been part of the AEIOU team for 5 years! I love AEIOU's family-centred approach, and I love working in a transdisciplinary team where we can learn from each other to inform the program and best support the children. Since my first day at AEIOU, we've changed a lot. I see the biggest changes as our stronger focus on professional development and the introduction of lower-ratio intensive intervention time to help the children achieve more skills more quickly. For me, the most exciting place at AEIOU is in my classroom with the children, particularly as they get ready to transition to their next learning environment. This is because it is an extraordinary culmination of effort from each child, their family members, and of course, our team, to see them through to a successful transition. It's a celebration!"

### Jessica Matthysen

*Senior Occupational Therapist  
and Program Coordinator,  
5 years' service*



"I started as a casual learning facilitator while I was finishing my university degree. I loved learning about how we support our learners in different ways that work for each of them. Every time a child gains a new skill or extra independence, they have the biggest grin on their face! Over the last five years, I've worked as an Occupational Therapist and Program Manager across our Bray Park, Bald Hills and Gold Coast centres. I'm now a Senior Occupational Therapist in the Program Coordinator team, providing support, training and supervision across AEIOU centres. When the going gets tough, I like to reflect on all of the children and families we've helped over the years."

### Jacqueline Welsh

*Room Leader, Sippy Downs,  
10 years' service*



"I've worked at AEIOU Sippy Downs since it opened just over ten years ago. Through my career, I've worked with children of all different ages and capabilities. I've seen babies grow into little people and start at new schools. It's the change in the children that amazes me most. Many families come back to see us or keep in touch on social media, allowing me to see their journey and growth even more. The fact that we as a team get the opportunity to share in their journey and help them develop skills to take the next step in their lives is so humbling. It's why I continue to do what I do."

# Supporting a resilient team

A strategic shift is happening to traditional Human Resources departments worldwide, where teams are being reinvented with a more holistic focus.

Best practice principles of fostering strong employee experiences, engagement, wellbeing and company culture have become key priorities. At AEIOU, we recognise the value in these changes and the benefit they bring to our organisation. As a leader in providing evidence-based and autism-specific early intervention, we understand what it means to be adaptive and harness the benefits of best practice approaches. The year, we saw a major redefinition of our original human resources function as the starting place for meaningful and lasting organisational change.

Say hello to the People, Culture & Safety team. We have introduced new roles to the team and have already built stronger relationships with our people. But what does this mean for our organisation? How are the People, Culture & Safety team's objectives aligned to support AEIOU's purpose of helping children with autism live their best lives?



## Increased focus on learning, development and leadership

We believe it's not just the children at AEIOU who never stop learning—as a team we learn from each other and build on one another's expertise. Ensuring our team feels well supported to do what they do best is a key target for our new People department; modernising our learning and development program using digital technologies is how we are doing it.

Our aim is to build the skills of our people, recognise those who go the extra step, and develop the achievers into leaders. We value our people and increasing our focus on learning and development is about investing in our teams. It's a sustainable investment because, in turn, our team will provide even higher quality support to AEIOU children and families.

## An emphasis on inclusion and building team engagement

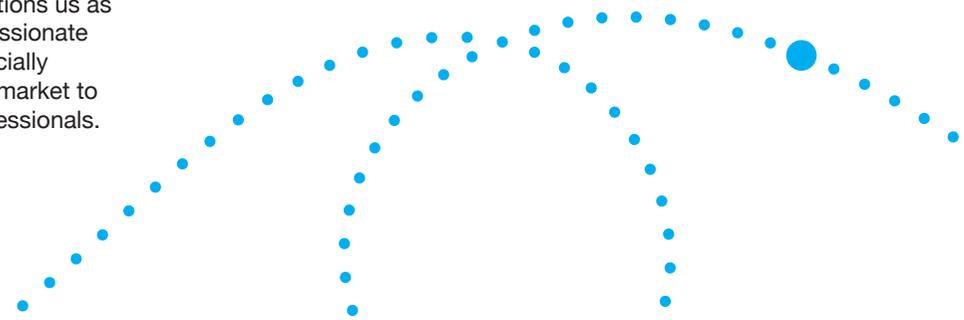
One of the first priorities of People, Culture and Safety is to empower our team with the skills to build a fair, supportive and inclusive workforce. This coming year, we're introducing parental leave and mental health leave policies to demonstrate our commitment to wellbeing. An inclusive workplace is central to creating an organisation our people are proud to work for.

A flow-on effect of our People, Culture & Safety team's new priorities is that it also improves our employee value proposition as an 'Employer of Choice' and positions us as a brand well regarded in the market to attract passionate and dedicated new team members. This is especially important in what continues to be a challenging market to recruit excellent allied health and education professionals.

## Beyond safety: wellbeing and performance

AEIOU team members have played a critical role in the evolution of our service. Over the years, our people have shaped our service by providing valuable thoughts on more structured learning curricula, stronger staff ratios, and more individualised staff training. Ensuring our teams feel safe, valued and cared for in their workplace is important to us—it has become essential to building resilience through a period marked by significant change, as we've navigated a global pandemic, changes presented by an evolving NDIS, and significant changes to our service model. Appointing a Head of Wellbeing, Performance and Culture has enabled us to advance our stance on workplace health and safety to reflect a greater understanding and acceptance of mental wellbeing. The environment we work in can be challenging, but our wellbeing program supports our team members to develop strategies to manage and protect their own mental wellbeing (inside and outside of work) and contribute to a positive and productive team culture.

This year has brought huge changes in our People, Culture & Safety team structure and focus but, just like our team members in the centres, we are resilient in times of change. Looking ahead into the new financial year, we look forward to collaborating with our team through AEIOU's Enterprise Agreement consultation and negotiations.



# Improving accessibility to fire safety

To better meet the learning needs of children with autism and improve their awareness of fire safety, AEIOU partnered with Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) to adapt the long-standing Fire Ed program.

Local Fire Officers who were delivering fire education training realised the existing program did not meet the learning needs of children with autism, and reached out to AEIOU with an opportunity to partner on the exciting project. As a result, our team of therapists has worked closely with QFES to modify language, adjust fire drill activities and focus on physical props to ensure more children have the skills to stay safe and act in a fire.

At AEIOU, we believe accessible fire safety education is critical for every child, particularly children with autism who until now have not had access to a program which caters to their specific needs.

Pilot trials of the reimagined program have taken place since April 2021, including one with a visit from Minister for Fire and Emergency Services Hon Mark Ryan, with an aim for the program to be accessible to all AEIOU centres across Queensland in 2022.

We hope to establish similar partnerships with agencies in South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory into the future.



# Developments in research

## Presentations

“Evidence-based update: Assessment and Intervention for Individuals with Autism who have Complex Communication Needs”, presented by Dr Madonna Tucker and Dr David Trembath at the Australian Psychological Society, October 2020. The presentation shared insights from clinical research published in the prior 12 months which directly informs assessment and intervention practices for psychologists working with children, adolescents and adults on the autism spectrum who have complex communication needs.

## Grants received

- “Parental perspectives on early intervention services for children with autism”, received from The Collier Charitable Fund (CCF) in conjunction with Macquarie University and QUT.

## Research collaborations

- “Improving academic outcomes by moderating anxiousness in autism.” Chief Investigators: Professor Deborah Keen, Dr Dawn Adams, Professor Ronald Rapee, Dr Kathryn Simpson along with Partner Investigators, Dr Jacqueline Rodgers from University of Newcastle on Tyne (UK) and Dr Madonna Tucker from AEIOU Foundation. Funded by Australian Research Council in conjunction with QUT’s Autism Centre of Excellence.
- “Capacity Building.” Investigators: Dr Madonna Tucker and Ms Lian Judy. The project focuses on increasing community awareness and understanding of autism by developing engaging and educational resources for families of children with autism, childcare

## Published research

Prelinguistic Interventions, *Current Developmental Disorders Reports*, 8, 106–111, DOI: 10.1007/s40474-021-00234-0. Tait, K., Sofripuolou, S., Tucker, M. (2020).

Brief Report: Perceived Evidence and Use of Autism Intervention Strategies in Early Intervention Providers. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50, 1088–1094, DOI: 10.1007/s10803-019-04332-2. Paynter, J., Luskin-Saxby, S., Keen, D., Fordyce, K., Frost, G., Imms, C., Miller, S., Sutherland, R., Trembath, D., Tucker, M., Ecker, U. (2020).

Field Testing an Australian Model of Practice for Teaching Young School-Age Children on the Autism Spectrum. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 113, DOI: 10.1016/j.ridd.2021.103942. Beamish, W., Taylor, A., Macdonald, L., Hay, S., Tucker, M., & Paynter, J. (2021).

Longitudinal Social and Communication Outcomes in Children with Autism Raised in Bi/Multilingual

and early education professionals, and allied health clinicians. The main topics covered are child development (early childhood milestones), introduction to autism, foundations of behaviour, teaching strategies (encouraging positive behaviour and learning) and adapting the AEIOU curriculum to individualise children’s learning experiences.

- “Understanding autism: Voices of parents.” Investigators: Dr Madonna Tucker, Dr Marijine Medhurst, Ms Nyssa Bowerman. The project aims to explore families’ understanding of autism, as well as the impact of autism on a family’s life and on participation in different aspects of community life. A group of families from various cultural backgrounds were interviewed and analysis of the data is currently taking place.

Environments, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, DOI: 10.1007/s10803-021-04940-x. Siyambalapitiya, S. Paynter, J., Nair, V., Reuterskiöld, C., Tucker, M., Trembath, D. (2021).

Supporting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. In *Diversity Inclusion and Engagement*; Hyde, M., Dole, S. & Tait, K. (4th Edition). Oxford University Press. Tucker, M. (2021).

Clinical outcomes and associated predictors of Early Intervention in Autism Spectrum Disorder: A study protocol. *British Medical Journal: Open*. Masi, A., Dissanayake, C., Alach, T., Cameron, K., Fordyce K., Frost, G., Grove, R., Heussler, H., Silove, N., Sulek, R., Tucker, M., Williams, K., Eapen, V. (2021).

Assessing the communication ability of young Aboriginal children with, or at risk for, developmental disability. *Journal of Psychology & Behavioral Science*. Tait, K., Tucker, M., & Donavon, M. (2021).

- “Parent Perspectives of Early Intervention Services.” Investigators: Dr Madonna Tucker, Dr Kathleen Tait (Macquarie University), and Dr Sofia Mavropoulou (QUT). The project explored parents’ understanding of early intervention services and their experiences while at AEIOU. A publication is currently being prepared focusing on how families make a decision on which early intervention service is right for their child.
- “Staff Perspectives.” Investigators: Dr Madonna Tucker, Dr Sofia Mavropoulou (Queensland University of Technology), Dr Kathleen Tait (Macquarie University), Dr Marijine Medhurst, Ms Kelly Hinckfuss, Ms Nyssa Bowerman. The project aims to gather information about staff perceptions and experiences while working at AEIOU, particularly during periods of significant change.



## Evaluating and reviewing the AEIOU curriculum

As our families have navigated uncertainty with COVID-19 and the NDIS, it was more important than ever that we help our community understand the true power of quality, autism-specific, best-practice early intervention programs.

This year, our Research & Assessment Team received funding from Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centres (ASELCC, as part of the Department of Social Services) to undertake a significant project deep-diving into our AEIOU curriculum. This study comprehensively evaluates the current AEIOU curriculum in comparison to best-practice therapeutic programs and established developmental assessments, aiming to ensure best quality early intervention for children with autism.

**It's good news: the AEIOU program is spot-on in teaching the children who attend our centres the skills they need to learn to develop and reach age-appropriate milestones, and incorporates a range of clinically sound and autism-specific teaching strategies.**

The Research & Assessment team mapped AEIOU's curriculum to developmental milestones, existing Australian curriculums (The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia, and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority – Foundation Year), and various assessments (Mullen Scales of Early Learning, Preschool Language Scale-5, Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule-2, Verbal Behaviour Milestones Assessment and Placement Program, Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills).

This study has also drawn attention to areas of our curriculum content, team training methods and our background systems (like our 'Little Steps' curriculum application) that could be improved on to provide more robust learning programs for children with autism. We look forward to implementing these activities in future stages of this project.

Congratulations to investigators Dr Madonna Tucker (AEIOU), Ms Lian Judy (AEIOU), Ms Nyssa Bowerman (AEIOU), and Ms Ashleigh Speck (AEIOU), with in-kind services provided by Dr Alison Willis (University of Sunshine Coast) and Dr Shelly Dole (University of Sunshine Coast).

# Messages from our families

“The transformation we have witnessed our son go through has been beyond our wildest expectations. Not only has A&I&O helped our son achieve so much it has also improved the lives of everyone in our family. I cannot thank the team at A&I&O enough.”

– Melinda, Toowoomba mum

“We will forever be grateful to A&I&O for bringing out our son’s smile, laughter and radiating joy. Before A&I&O, he was frustrated and alone in his silent world but now he is connected with us and the world around him.”

– Ashleigh, Bundaberg mum

“Before my son started at A&I&O, he was completely non-verbal. I was worried for his future. Now I’m not worried at all – every day he’s achieving and accomplishing things I never thought he would. Best of all, I now feel empowered to help him.”

– Naomi, Adelaide mum

“When you first receive an ASD diagnosis for your child, there are so many unknowns and you feel so lost. A&I&O not only provided AMAZING support for our son, Alfie, but have been so incredibly supportive of us as parents – providing tools, information sessions and guidance.”

– Olivia, Nathan mum





# Our supporters

In a year like no other, our fundraising department needed to be resilient, with events a significant generator of revenue for AEIOU. While the NDIS funds therapy-related services for the children in our service, our organisation relies on an extensive mix of fundraising events to maintain and improve equipment and facilities for the children who attend AEIOU Foundation centres.

COVID-19 continued to present challenges for our fundraising events in the latter half of 2020 and throughout much of 2021.

A highlight has been our successful debut in the digital fundraising world, with our Triple Impact Giving Day in November raising an incredible \$390,000.

We are grateful to our generous partners, donors and friends throughout the community during this challenging time.



Collier  
Charitable  
Fund

The Flannery  
Foundation

STAN AND  
MAUREEN DUKE  
FOUNDATION



## November 2020

**Team Jacob Boutique Beer Lunch**  
\$30,000 raised

## December 2020

**Image Property Golf Day**  
\$20,000 raised

**Triple Impact Day**  
\$388,000 raised

## March 2021

**Talking Heads Lunch**  
Raises \$40,000 for vital educational resources

## April 2021

**Take A Hike Toowoomba**  
Record breaking year; \$58,000 raised

## May 2021

**Chain Reaction – 7 day ride**  
Raises \$290,000 for Townsville

## June 2021

**Raise the Roof Gala**  
\$110,000 raised for Townsville

**Perpetual Grant**  
\$70,000 for Toowoomba centre

**John James Foundation**  
\$400,000 for research assessment tools

# Our leadership

## Board of Directors



**Susan Rix AM**  
Chair



**A/Prof James Morton AM**  
Founder and Patron



**Peter Kelly**  
Deputy Chair/Director



**Euan Morton**  
Director



**Scott Reading**  
Director



**Dayle Grant**  
Director



**Mark Algje**  
Director



**A/Prof Bev Rowbotham  
AO**  
Director



**Ben Deverson**  
Director

## Executive Management Team



**Alan Smith**  
Chief Executive Officer



**Shane Klintworth**  
General Manager



**Matthew Clapham**  
Chief Financial Officer



**Deb Crawford**  
Head of People, Culture  
& Safety



**Deborah Whiteoak**  
Corporate Affairs Manager  
(job share)



**Nicola Morgan**  
Corporate Affairs Manager  
(job share)



**Stuart McFarlane**  
Chief Information Officer

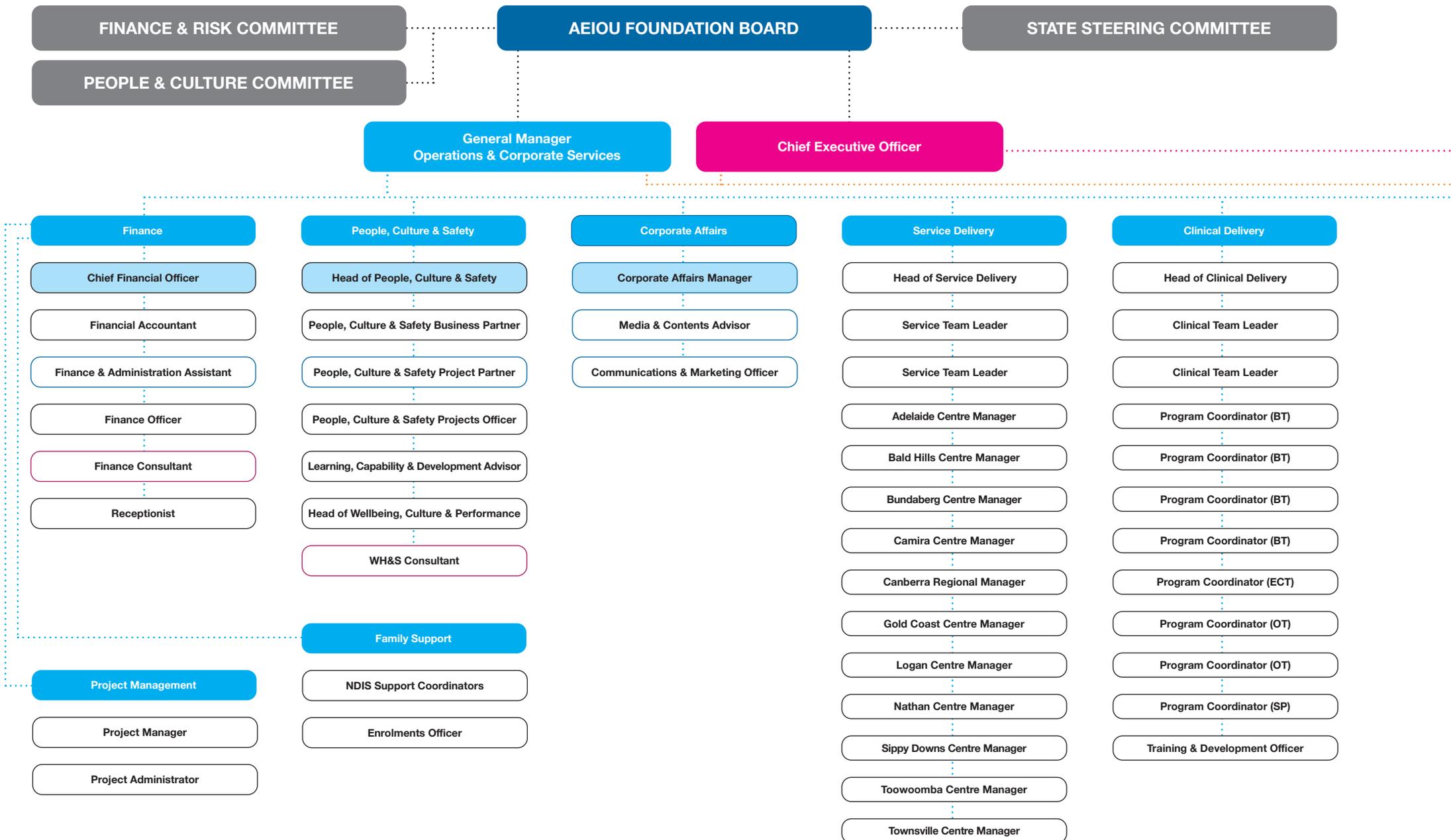


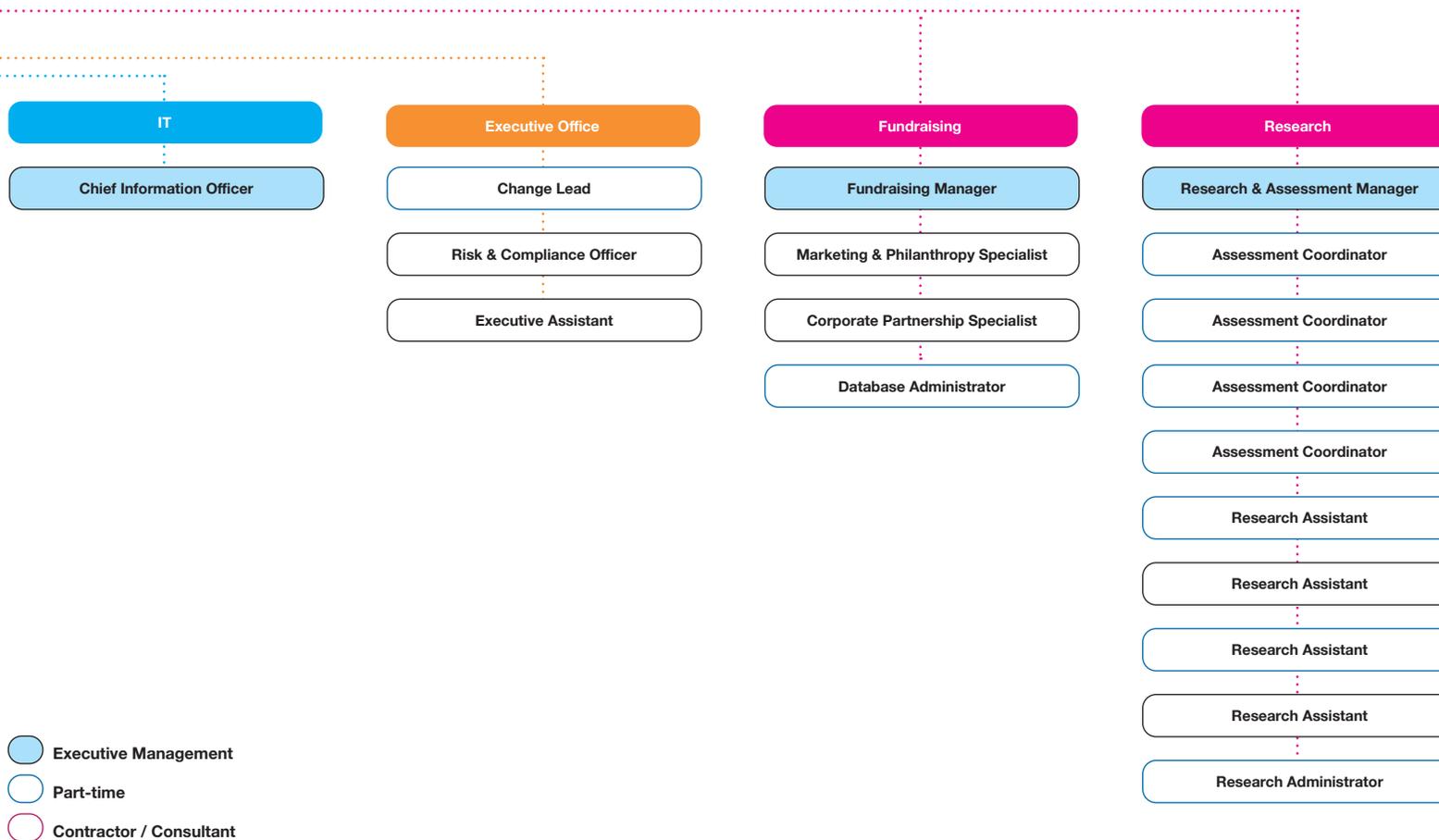
**Dr Madonna Tucker**  
Research and Assessment  
Manager



**Karen Descovich**  
Fundraising Manager

# Our governance structure





# Financial Summary

## Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income

For the Year Ended 30 June 2021	2021 \$	2020 \$
<b>Revenue and other income</b>		
Revenue from contracts with customers	20,869,226	19,092,453
Other revenue and income	3,675,594	9,404,288
	<u>24,544,820</u>	<u>28,496,741</u>
<b>Less: expenses</b>		
Employee benefits expense	(20,790,993)	(16,305,254)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(1,294,118)	(1,277,918)
Professional services fees	(889,771)	(338,337)
Repairs, maintenance and cleaning expenses	(729,593)	(568,646)
Telecommunication expenses	(284,065)	(199,859)
Advertising expense	(261,710)	(178,783)
Insurance expense	(256,315)	(237,188)
Classroom and education	(209,930)	(160,977)
Occupancy expense	(196,704)	(181,029)
IT and other contractor costs	(174,682)	(39,729)
Travel costs	(172,685)	(131,573)
Event costs	(160,986)	(135,435)
Finance costs	(49,311)	(69,950)
Motor vehicle expenses	(40,637)	(27,630)
Bad and doubtful debts	(27,027)	(63,282)
Loss on disposal of plant and equipment		(16,516)
Other expenses	(1,295,105)	(1,225,800)
	<u>(26,833,632)</u>	<u>(21,157,906)</u>
<b>Surplus for the year</b>	<u>(2,288,812)</u>	<u>7,338,835</u>
<b>Other comprehensive income</b>		
<i>Items that will not be reclassified subsequently to profit and loss</i>		
Revaluation of property, plant and equipment, net of tax		(764,093)
		<u>(764,093)</u>
<b>Other comprehensive income for the year</b>		<u>(764,093)</u>
<b>Total comprehensive income</b>	<u>(2,288,812)</u>	<u>6,574,742</u>

## Statement of Financial Position

As at 30 June 2021

	2021 \$	2020 \$
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	3,499,378	4,241,106
Receivables	1,186,461	1,554,048
Other assets	325,009	194,635
	5,010,848	5,989,789
Land and buildings classified as held for sale		1,200,000
<b>Total current assets</b>	5,010,848	7,189,789
<b>Non-current assets</b>		
Receivables	20,869	
Property, plant and equipment	18,070,359	18,210,011
Intangible assets	454,287	505,012
Lease assets	2,456,768	657,900
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	21,002,283	19,372,923
<b>Total assets</b>	26,013,131	26,562,712
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Payables	1,164,065	687,338
Lease liabilities	662,259	290,932
Borrowings	22,628	483,974
Provisions	1,305,053	915,298
Other liabilities	511,222	921,089
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	3,665,227	3,298,631
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Lease liabilities	1,856,144	452,353
Borrowings	17,886	40,515
Provisions	294,958	303,485
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	2,168,988	796,353
<b>Total liabilities</b>	5,834,215	4,094,984
<b>Net assets</b>	20,178,916	22,467,728
<b>Equity</b>		
Reserves	4,349,968	4,349,968
Retained surplus	15,828,948	18,117,760
<b>Total equity</b>	20,178,916	22,467,728



**Registered office:**

3 Balaclava Street, Woolloongabba Qld 4102

 07 3320 7500

 PO Box 8072 Woolloongabba Qld 4102

 [info@aeiou.org.au](mailto:info@aeiou.org.au) | [aeiou.org.au](http://aeiou.org.au)

**ABN:** 19 135 897 255 | Registered Charity CH1818