



**aeiou**  
FOUNDATION  
for children with autism

CELEBRATING **15** YEARS

*Children with  
autism living  
their best lives*

**Annual Report**  
2019-2020 | AEIOU Foundation



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# Welcome to AEIOU Foundation

## We're committed to helping children with autism live their best lives.

In February 2005, the landscape for autism-specific early intervention in Queensland shifted. AEIOU Foundation was founded, and we opened our doors to 12 children, with six specialist staff and a goal to ensure every child with autism had an opportunity to access high-quality therapy and support tailored to their needs, without compromising on a kindergarten experience. Today, those children have graduated from high school, and are ready to tackle the next chapter of life as young adults with their own hopes and dreams.

Today, our service operates across 10 centres, with an 11<sup>th</sup> under construction. We enrol more than 340 children across our service every year, supporting them to live their best lives. We celebrate neurodiversity, and provide an environment where each child and their unique qualities are embraced and respected. At AEIOU, education is accessible, and therapeutic support helps children develop skills which set a strong foundation to live with greater independence and confidence, and to access their community, friendships, family, and more.

We are family-focussed and consider ourselves privileged to partner with families in the early years of a child's life. Autism is a lifelong journey, and the evidence around how we can best support people with autism continues to develop. Upon 15 years of operation, we look to the future and see an opportunity to enhance our service offering, and we look forward to sharing this journey with current families, future families and our community.



*"AEIOU was a family. We became the greatest support network to each other and still stay in contact to this day" - The Deen Shakoor Family*

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AEIOU Foundation acknowledges our work takes place on the traditional lands of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We pay our respects to the traditional custodians of this land and to the elders of these communities, past, present, and emerging.

AEIOU Foundation is a registered charity (CH1818) under 'The Collections Act' of 1996 and is endorsed as a deductible gift recipient under the Subdivision 30-BA of the Income Tax Assessment Act 1997.



### Our reporting process:

This is the 11th annual report submitted by AEIOU Foundation, documenting AEIOU's financial, operational and community performance for the financial year ending 30 June 2020. Feedback is welcome and can be emailed to [info@aeiou.org.au](mailto:info@aeiou.org.au).



# 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.**

While no two people with autism are the same, there are generally two main areas of difficulty, commonly referred to as the 'dyad of impairments'. These include:

- Social and communication, including difficulty with body language and verbal communication, reciprocal conversation, emotional and social reciprocity and managing structured parts of the day.
- Thought flexibility, including hyper- or hypo-sensitivity to sensory input, routines, repetitive behaviours and rituals.

There is no established cause or cure for autism, however evidence demonstrates early intervention, delivered within a program that meets the *Early Intervention for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Guidelines for Good Practice* (Prior & Roberts 2012), will provide children with the best opportunity to reach their full potential.

In the 2012 Guidelines, Prior & Roberts review the current evidence of outcomes of early intervention for children with autism to identify the key elements for effective, safe and necessary autism-specific early intervention. This is a tool for both practitioners and families seeking high-quality, reasonable and necessary intervention.

*"Jack has just turned seven, and has a group of friends at school, including a best friend. He is so joyful and happy, and he loves going to school. He still has his struggles, but we couldn't be more proud of him and happy at how far he has come. To think three years ago he was starting at AEIOU, unable to communicate. AEIOU will forever be in our hearts." – Elizabeth, mum*



# About autism and early intervention

**1 in 100 Australians** are diagnosed with autism, according to the Open Paediatric Medicine Journal 2012.

Males are diagnosed with autism more often than females. This disparity may be due to the difference in how characteristics of autism present for each gender and the diagnosis process.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018) reported there are 205,200 Australians living with autism, an increase from 164,000 in 2015.

**Of these, 101,900 are young people, aged 5-20.**

**Due to the nature of human brain plasticity, the earlier the intervention, the larger the impact on outcomes** (Hadders-Algra, 2011).

It is common for people with autism to have other medical conditions, including but not limited to asthma, epilepsy and cognitive impairments.

By investing in early intervention, it is more likely a child will grow up to live with greater independence, obtain employment, and experience inclusion within the community.



## About AEIOU

AEIOU provided supports to **375 children** throughout this financial year.

Up to **1,500 children** have graduated from AEIOU since 2005.

AEIOU operates **10** early intervention centres, including: Bald Hills, Bundaberg, Camira, Gold Coast, Logan, Nathan, Sippy Downs, Toowoomba, Townsville, and Adelaide (SA).

AEIOU delivers early intervention to children diagnosed with **Level 2 and Level 3** autism.

**98.5%** of children improved their overall communication skills, and the average improvement after one year at AEIOU in auditory comprehension 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 **378** staff members, including **259** permanent and fixed-term employees.

**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 benefit from families and staff working together.



# Message from the Chair

**Nobody could have predicted what this year would look like. The onset of COVID-19 and the long-term side effects of this pandemic have made a significant imprint on our personal and professional lives, changing what we do and how we do it for some time to come.**

AEIOU is still a young organisation, with the benefit of a strong entrepreneurial spirit and a workforce that has a natural ability to adapt quickly. Our people expertly navigated this health crisis and despite the effects of COVID-19, we have managed to maintain stability at AEIOU and steady progress towards achieving the goals we set for the next three years.

In our strategic blueprint, we have set goals in areas of research, advocacy, our people and sustainable services, and have met each of the targets set for this year despite the impacts of the pandemic.

Our clients, including children and their parents and guardians are the primary consideration in every decision we make, with a strong focus on the quality of our

service and the evidence which informs our practices. Since AEIOU's inception, we have not only provided quality therapy and care, we have increased awareness about autism, advocated for families by working with all levels of government and other industry partners to champion fairness and equality for children with autism from diagnosis to adulthood.

We continue to consider our direction and we are currently planning for future investment to enhance our service capabilities, with a goal to ensure we have a dynamic service offering that can meet the changing needs of children now and in the years to come.

So, there is growth and change on the horizon, and we look forward to sharing this journey with our community.

I'd like to acknowledge AEIOU's Directors, Executive Management Team, and each staff member in our service for their unwavering commitment to AEIOU's mission and vision. Our supporters, including those connecting with us for the first time this year, and those who have been part of the fabric of AEIOU since the beginning deserve special recognition. I also thank each family who has chosen AEIOU as their partner in early intervention.

On 15 years of operation, I reflect on AEIOU's origins. This is an organisation that was born because two parents saw a huge gap in the area of early intervention in our country and set about fixing it. AEIOU is a living legacy, and the same heart lives on in this organisation. We are proud of our achievements and impact, but also our ability to maintain a strong connection to the values which gave this organisation life.

**Susan Rix AM**  
AEIOU Foundation Chair



*Susan Rix AM*



# Message from the Chief Executive Officer and General Manager

**This year has been unlike any other in our lifetime. And despite the obvious challenges, from an organisational perspective, there are many highlights. These include opening our new centre in Bald Hills, commencing construction on a service in Canberra, starting work on a major refurbishment for our Toowoomba centre, constructing a new classroom in Bundaberg, and of course, celebrating our 15th anniversary.**

If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that our staff are resilient, committed and bound by a shared vision to achieve the best outcomes we can for our families, even when faced with a major crisis in our local, national and global community.

An absolute standout is the development of AEIOU@Home. Over four weeks, a team of senior clinicians dedicated their waking hours to the creation of a remote-support service to ensure families in self-isolation could access support and maintain early intervention for their children.

This program connected families in new, and unique ways. We were grateful to access a classroom at Goodstart Harristown Childcare

while managing major works at our centre on Friend Street. In the week between transferring from the Goodstart centre back into AEIOU, our AEIOU@Home provided continuity in therapy for each of the children.

COVID-19 has changed how we work, and it's not always been easy. Strict health management for staff and children has proven a challenge and restrictions for visitors into the centres (including our families) has been something we have all had to adjust to.

Overall, our goal was to ensure that families and staff had access to up-to-date information at every step and could access any support they needed. Likewise, we sought to ensure our staff could feel confident in their employment, and wellbeing. We made a commitment early on to maintain all employment, including our casual staff members, many of whom have been loyal to AEIOU for many years. We experienced a loss of around 22% in revenue, but maintained stability in our operations and continue to emerge through the crisis.

Business as usual continued: we maintained advocacy for families, both for individual families and via submissions for various state-led and national inquiries. And, most excitingly, we continued to canvas opportunities to expand our service offering. We took time to map our client's journey from diagnosis, right through to engaging with AEIOU and up to exiting the service.

This, along with further investigations has provided a strong foundation to scope a range of service offerings which we expect to establish by mid-2021.

We also made a commitment to introduce new systems and processes, including a Client Information System, which we anticipate implementing within the 2021-2022 financial year.

The New Year will bring fresh challenges and achievements to strive towards. We are grateful for the guidance and support of our Board of Directors, the commitment of the Executive Management Team and the extraordinary work of our staff, across our services and in our central office. Everybody at AEIOU makes a difference, and their work is invaluable.

We would also like to thank our supporters, who have helped to shape AEIOU over the past 15 years. We have enjoyed relationships which go beyond regular philanthropy and have extended to partnership with a genuine shared vision. It's an amazing thing.

Finally, we recognise the families, past and present, who have chosen AEIOU to support them during the early years of an autism diagnosis.

**Alan Smith and Shane Klintworth**  
CEO and General Manager



Alan Smith



Shane Klintworth

# Celebrating 15 years: A Queensland Great



James Morton AM

Image credit: The Courier-Mail

**This year marked AEIOU's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Since first opening our doors, around 1,500 children have been supported to achieve their own personal goals.**

In June, AEIOU's legacy was recognised, with our Patron A/Prof James Morton AM receiving a Queensland Great Award in recognition of his work with AEIOU Foundation, The Leukaemia Foundation and ICON Cancer Care.

This award recognises the efforts and achievements of remarkable individuals and institutions, with James honoured alongside his contemporaries with a commemorative plaque displayed in the Roma Street Parklands in Brisbane.

For James, this was an award that belongs not just to him, but the people who have been behind AEIOU every step of the way, including many who pledged their support in the very early stages of this organisation's planning and development.

In addition to thanking each of those who affected policy and funding, and who provided philanthropic and leadership support, James also acknowledged the staff at AEIOU:

*"Perhaps the ultimate achievement has been building a team of passionate, highly skilled autism specialists who together have created, implemented and digitised the AEIOU curriculum. This enormous piece of work ensures quality, focus and consistency in service delivery wherever AEIOU operates and is the scaffold for future research and innovation. I would like to recognise all our wonderful staff who work with our children every day and who completed this enormous undertaking. I especially acknowledge our long-term CEO Alan Smith for his leadership and never-give-in attitude (exemplified by recovering from poor-risk acute leukaemia and a bone marrow transplant and coming back to AEIOU stronger and even more determined).*

*In looking forward to the next 15 years, it is my hope that AEIOU will be able to reach all children of need, wherever they live in Australia and beyond our borders and that these children will transition into a supportive and knowledgeable school system and subsequent post-school environment.*

*The 15 years has been an amazing journey for Louise and me. I don't think Peter Kelly (AEIOU Director), and in fact any of us sitting around our dining table in 2004 would have envisaged in our wildest dreams where AEIOU would be in 2020. Everyone involved should take great pride in building a 'Queensland Great' and I hope you all continue to see no boundaries to what you can do over the next 15 years."*





# Our Priorities



This year, AEIOU's Board of Directors established a new three-year strategic blueprint with core focus areas including research, advocacy, our people and sustainable services. These areas and our values will guide us to:

- 1 Deliver the best quality early intervention for children with autism (aged 2 – 6 years)
- 2 Meet our research targets, with an emphasis on both contributing to this sector on a local, national and global scale
- 3 Respond to the needs of our community, including those requiring supports in remote or regional locations
- 4 Foster a strong team and service culture, with accountability to our promises to our clients and our teams
- 5 Maintain strong partnerships with all partners, including but not limited to the NDIA alongside local, state and federal governments

## Achievements: this year at a glance

- > **Research:** Delivered a Parental Perspective Study, launched a set of Clinical Guides to Support Children with Minimal Language (Griffith University and ASELCC Partnership), and published A Model of Practice for Building Teacher Capacity in Educating Young School-Age Children on the Autism Spectrum in the International Journal of Disability, Development and Education.
- > **Advocacy:** A strong focus this year, with local and national contributions via Australian Autism Alliance, Disability Collaborative Group, Queensland Transitional Advisory Group.
- > **Our people:** We digitised our curriculum, launching our customised app 'Little Steps' across the organisation. As part of our focus on wellbeing and employee experiences, we established a Board-led People and Culture Committee and doubled our commitment to professional development. Our clients received additional supports during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the creation of AEIOU@Home to support children and families unable to attend AEIOU in person.
- > **Sustainable services:** As part of a plan to establish a digital transformation that will support the business into the future, we launched a digital platform to manage all clinical data, in addition to the creation of a Board-led risk and governance committee. The service expanded, with the opening of our Bald Hills service. We also celebrated the turning of the sod on our new Canberra development and completed a major refurbishment on our Toowoomba centre.



## On the horizon

- > **Research:** Finalising the Parental Perspective Study, and delivering a series of studies including a Multicultural Autism Awareness Project, Building Capacity through Robots as Therapy Assistants, and Staff Perspective Study.
- > **Advocacy:** Ongoing collaboration with the NDIA through strategic sector partnerships along with direct advocacy, with a focus on accessibility and affordability for participants accessing the Scheme, including through changes to the NDIS Price Guide and Assessment Tools.
- > **Our People:** Establishing a workforce that is equipped to lead AEIOU into the next phase of growth; we are focused on the end-to-end employee experience. We will strengthen our clinical supervisory team and increase our focus on wellbeing. We will focus on client experiences, ensuring parents as well as children are best supported to progress through their journey at AEIOU.
- > **Sustainable services:** A significant priority is to enhance our model of service and our operating model, with the first phase of a major initiative to begin in October and to be completed by end-June 2021. This ties into our client experience and is a high priority. This model will ensure AEIOU is equipped to meet the changing needs of our clients, enabling sustainable evolution and growth in an evolving NDIS landscape.



In line with our digital transformation, AEIOU will invest in a Client Information System and improve our Donor Management System and electronic record keeping.

Our Canberra Region centre is expected to open by July 2021.



# Year at a glance

*"When Emileigh started at AEIOU, I went in with the intention that she'd come out 'fixed.' I know better now; she was never broken. She's my child and she's so beautiful, that's all that matters. I couldn't imagine my life, or my daughter's, any other way. Emileigh's perfect." - Ben, dad*

## A snapshot on intake



At AEIOU, all children are assessed upon intake and again at 12-month intervals. A variety of standardised assessment tools are used, including the Mullen Scales of Early Learning Assessment, the Vinelands Adaptive Behaviour Scales and the Preschool Language Scale (PLS).

This data comes to life by forming the foundation of each child's therapy goals and providing the opportunity to map progress for each child in our service.

This year's intake data shows us:

**2.93 years** - The average age of AEIOU children at time of diagnosis

**3.7 years** - The average age of children when commencing at AEIOU

**35.9%** of children at AEIOU had a Level 2 diagnosis, **31.5%** a Level 3 diagnosis, and **2.2%** of children had a Level 2-3 diagnosis, while **30.4%** of AEIOU children did not have a level provided at diagnosis.

**53.1%** of our children were not yet toilet trained when they started with AEIOU

**27.1%** of our children had a co-diagnosis, the most common being Global Developmental Delay (GDD)

Our families came from 21 different countries, including India, Pakistan, New Zealand, China and England

## Across our service



**375** children enrolled in AEIOU centres during the financial year

**5** sets of twins and **1** set of triplets enrolled into service

**231,588** hours of therapy delivered in the year, including **964** hours of therapy via AEIOU@Home

**48** new places created due to service expansions in Bald Hills, Bundaberg, Toowoomba and Sippy Downs

**204** families provided with fee relief to support their attendance, made possible with support from Blue Care, Lynn Wright Memorial Fund, COVID-19 subsidies and direct support from AEIOU

**87** children successfully transitioned on to their next education setting

**542** assessments conducted across our services

**45** staff were supported to work from home during the pandemic

**1** family with twins travelled from the Northern Territory by car during the pandemic to commence an enrolment at AEIOU, completing their two-week quarantine in their caravan

**200** iPads were deployed across services to support the launch of our digital platform, Little Steps

**32** new trikes were purchased across our centres

## Fundraising support

**\$25,882** received from Community Grant Funding to supply educational toys and resources across centres in Queensland.

Over **100** volunteers supported AEIOU at fundraising events

**\$3,000** received to support centre Christmas parties for children in our care

**\$21,000** received from The Courier Mail Children's Fund for 10 external communication boards for centre playgrounds

**\$6,000** gifted for 10 new iPads for centres from the Queensland Masonic Touring Club and Hand Heart Pocket.

**\$100,000** gift received towards a robotics research program

**\$750,000** centre refurbishment in Toowoomba made possible with thanks to Peter Haeusler, Lyn & Bobbie Brazil and Chain Reaction Women's 300

**4** new shade sails, across Logan and Sippy Downs sites



## Advocacy

We have an important role to play in raising awareness of autism and advocating for the needs of children with autism and their families. Every child has a right to lead an inclusive and meaningful life. We believe fairness and equality should abound for all children.

This year, we:

- Made a submission to Independent Advisory Council and Joint Standing Committee on the limitations of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.
- Presented before a Parliamentary Steering Committee meeting for the NDIS.
- Developed a position paper for the National Disability Insurance Agency on permanent disability plans.
- Engaged directly with the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme Stuart Robert MP. to advocate for individual families who were at high risk.
- Partnered with Autism Alliance to prepare a paper and joint submission for the Select Committee on Autism.



# A family story: Matari Fing

**Matari is five. He loves to sing and ride his scooter. Matari is an Aboriginal word meaning 'a man'. He comes from a proud indigenous family from the Southern Downs. He was diagnosed with autism just after he turned two. His Mum, Christina, shares some of their journey.**

When Matari was still very little, I noticed there was something a bit different to his development compared to my other children. He was not responding to his name and he wasn't saying anything apart from what he saw on TV. He wasn't really talking much at all and he'd stopped doing things that he had been doing, such as clapping and waving goodbye. He would line up any toy he was playing with and it didn't matter what it was. He was quiet, didn't sleep much and he wasn't interested in other kids.

We took him to the doctor who referred us to the 'Mums and Bubs' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service (ATSICHS) at Logan where a speech therapist, occupational therapist and paediatrician were all under one roof. Being able to go to an indigenous clinic was great because they understood where we were coming from.

I was very emotional and upset the day the paediatrician diagnosed Matari with autism. It wasn't that I thought his life was over, but I was so sad to think that he was not going to be like the other kids. I didn't know anything about autism and I even asked the doctor if I needed to take him out of day care. I started doing a lot of reading about autism.

The clinic had an autism support group and we went along to that. It was one of the mums who came to this group who told me more about AEIOU; she had an older child attend. At that time, there was an AEIOU centre being built at Logan so when it opened it seemed to work out just perfectly for us. Though, if it wasn't for the other mum who told me about it, I probably would never have found it. My advice to other parents would be to find a support group. It is always good to talk to other parents that are going through or have been through the same thing as you.

It was August 2018 when Matari started with AEIOU. He was three. At his first AEIOU assessment, the staff asked a lot of questions and watched him play. I felt very comfortable and it was easy to talk to them. I liked that they could watch him and get an idea of where he was at, so it wasn't just about what I was saying. We talked about what Matari's goals would be and the team really listened to what I hoped for Matari to achieve.

I was nervous about Matari going to AEIOU full-time - he was only going two days a week to day care. But I had nothing to worry about. He transitioned well and didn't get upset. All it took was one day, and he was happy to go back the next. He's been going five days ever since.

Now, Matari can say more words. He says just one word, or a couple of phrases, to communicate what he wants. We can usually understand him and he's much less frustrated now than when we first started. He's also doing well with toilet training too. There was a time I thought he would never be out of nappies, and he used to have a bottle up until he was five. AEIOU has helped him learn and adapt to change. Some of the things that I thought were going to be difficult, were not.

Their occupational therapist has developed a sleep strategy for Matari which we have been following at home. It's a board with pictures of dinner, pyjamas, bed, reading time and sleep with those words alongside them. We work through them every night and Matari has adjusted to those prompts well. He mainly sleeps through the night now: it's been a big change for me!

Matari loves anything outdoors. He loves swings, slides, and the trampoline. His favourite thing to do is ride on the scooter and he's good at it too! He's still not too interested in the other kids; he's only just started playing with his older siblings in the last year which has been great progress.



One of the best things about Matari is the way he can sing songs and how happy it makes him. He starts to sing as soon as he wakes up. And, he'll sing anything he might have been watching, or what he hears on the radio. His memory is amazing, he seems to pick the song words up immediately. His favourite song right now is "I love my teddy bear".

Next year, Matari will go to Logan Special School. It will be another change and there will be new things to learn so the AEIOU team and I will talk about how to transition him. It might not be easy, but we can do it.

My message to parents is don't be afraid to speak up for your child, you are their voice and know what's best for them!

- Christina Dallen



# Our people

Following the complete rollout of the NDIS, we reviewed our workforce planning strategy in recognition of the unique challenges that staff experience when working in a caring environment. This was a high priority as a result of the impact felt by our people when adapting to an evolving work environment due to the NDIS - a major reform.

A strategic workforce plan was finalised, utilising the funding from a grant acquisition in the previous year. This was developed in readiness for the anticipated growth AEIOU will continue to experience in the next three to five years.

The Program Coordinator Team, designed to support the frontline therapy team, was expanded, and positions for team leads were established to ensure the staff and caseloads across all centres are well-supported.

Professional development, resilience and wellbeing are increasingly important priorities at AEIOU. Additional staff training days were established, ensuring all staff would have access to at least eight days of formal training throughout the year. This is in addition to a two-day workshop for centre managers, program managers and program coordinators with a resilience and wellbeing coach in late 2019.

Further, a position to lead wellbeing, culture and performance was established, with recruitment commencing in June 2020. A People and Culture Committee was established, led by AEIOU Board Directors and executive managers, meeting monthly.

The Reward and Recognition program continues, and our first Employee of the Year was announced in December 2019. Linh Huynh was recognised for taking on the role of Behaviour Support Practitioner at our Toowoomba centre, an extra role outside her discipline, and for taking time to mentor early childhood teachers.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected all pillars of our organisation in 2020. It was imperative to safeguard all team members, including our valued casual workforce. All rosters were maintained, despite the number of families who self-isolated, and casual staff members who required a COVID-19 test were remunerated for playing an important role in slowing the spread of the virus.

Each centre also received care packages on a weekly basis and COVID-19 safety plans were established and implemented across all locations, and various procedures were created to maintain the health of our team and clients.

Beyond COVID, AEIOU gifted each staff member with a day of annual leave on their birthday to celebrate our 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

While turnover is typically high within this industry and AEIOU has experienced significant challenges due to factors such as the complete NDIS rollout, this year, we have seen a 64% reduction in turnover.

*"I've built wonderful relationships with the team at AEIOU, and they are all brilliant. In every team member, there is a passion for what they do. My confidence has improved, and I feel listened to." - Joanne, mum*



# Meet our people

Many of our people have been part of AEIOU's fabric for years. They make the Foundation what it is today. Here are some of their wonderful stories.

## Mary-Ellen Ross

*Learning Facilitator,  
Bundaberg centre,  
9 years of service*



There is something special about AEIOU and its purpose. I love the way the children are given the best opportunity to live their best lives. I enjoy being part of a transdisciplinary team where each role is as important as the other. When I started, the moment I saw the children being given the opportunity they deserve for an education while being nurtured and engaged, I was in awe. It's nothing like I could have imagined. AEIOU has created a passion for me, which is something that continues to grow.

## Joanne Stephen

*Senior Speech  
Pathologist & Program  
Coordinator, Central  
Office, 8 years of service*



I love the creative space, teamwork and the transdisciplinary learning that is unique to AEIOU. I started as a Speech Therapist at our Gold Coast centre and have worked across various centres since then. The organisation has evolved tremendously, and I love that I am

still learning and challenging my own clinical reasoning. Now, I am a senior Speech Pathologist and part of the Program Coordinator team that supports our team across all centres, but I still work closely with the children and staff across our centres. I think when families come to AEIOU, they're looking for a place to call home, and a team of people who understand them and are willing to walk through this initial journey with them. I think they really find that here.

## Sandy Peachey

*Service Manager,  
Toowoomba, 12 years  
of service*



I started as a Learning Facilitator more than 10 years ago, wanting to make a difference in the lives of children with ASD. Prior to that, I'd been working in the state primary school system. To see the change and growth that the children gain, to see their happy faces when they achieve something for the first time, to be a part of their lives and share their successes along the way, both while at AEIOU and beyond, is wonderful and very rewarding.

## Linda Pigott

*Research Assessment  
Coordinator, 3 years  
of service*



I was very interested in the work AEIOU was doing. I wanted to join the Research & Assessment Department, but there weren't any roles available, so I volunteered my time within that team to get a foot in the door. Then, a Learning Facilitator role came up, and I jumped at the chance. It was when I secured that position that I truly learnt to appreciate the hard work the teams in the centres put in. In my role now, I conduct psychometric assessments with the children and their families upon intake, at 12 months and upon their exit of our service. Seeing the gains the children make over this time, and the aspirations and support each family has for their child's future, is most rewarding.

## Zenobia Potia

*Teacher/Room Leader,  
Nathan centre, 8 years  
of service*



I love my job at AEIOU. No day is ever the same and there is never a dull moment. All it takes is a grin from one of the children or a small step towards one of their milestones to remind me of why I do what I do. The people I work with top the list; they have become my family and taught me so much. I've evolved as a teacher over the years too, just as AEIOU has as an organisation. It's at AEIOU that I've learned the real meaning of gratitude and to appreciate and celebrate even our smallest successes. They may be the biggest in the eyes of the children and families.





## Sam Tsai

*Senior Occupational Therapist & Program Coordinator, 6 years of service*



AEIOU has been everything I expected and more. Before I qualified as an Occupational Therapist, I was one of AEIOU's Learning Facilitators, so I got to see then how effectively the therapy team collaborated. Now, I work across our centres supporting our teams. It has been incredibly rewarding. I'm inspired by the creativity of our therapists who go above and beyond to find new ways to teach our children new skills. Whether it's creating new resources or hosting activities such as 'Food School' or 'Poo Parties', it's amazing to support our teams who want nothing but the best for the children.

## Katrina Ives

*Family Support Liaison and NDIS Specialist, 10 years of service*

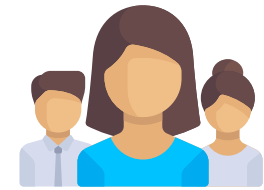


I started out helping families during the enrolment process as part of the Administration team, and supporting our accounts team. To my delight, AEIOU has been more than I expected. I've had opportunity to increase my knowledge in many areas in an environment that is rapidly changing for everyone. I've been able to grow within this organisation and try new things, but supporting families has always been at the heart of what I do. Helping them achieve their desired outcomes for their child and working with a passionate team is what I love most. It's through conversations with parents and their generosity of sharing their journey that I have come to understand the impact of an autism diagnosis. Hearing their stories has been inspirational; it drives me to know more and help as much as possible.

*"Jaz learnt to embrace her differences, sharing freely with other people helps them to understand why she behaves a little differently. She has started to grow up, mature and regulate her emotions. I've taught her to be her own advocate. Jaz's time at AEIOU changed her destiny. Had we not gone there, I have no idea where we'd be. The foundations for all the good that is happening now were laid there. I'm so grateful she got to go to AEIOU." - Jolene, mum*



# Our leadership team



## Our Board



**Susan Rix AM**  
Chair



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



**Peter Kelly**  
Deputy Chair/Director



**Alan Smith**  
Chief Executive Officer



**Shane Klintworth**  
General Manager



**Matthew Clapham**  
Chief Financial Officer



**Euan Morton**  
Director



**Scott Reading**  
Director



**Dayle Grant**  
Director



**Dr Madonna Tucker**  
Research and Assessment  
Manager



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



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



**Mark Algie**  
Director



**A/Prof Bev Rowbotham  
AO**  
Director



**Ben Deverson**  
Director



**Karen Descovich**  
Fundraising Manager



**Laura Dodd**  
Director of People  
and Performance



# Client and community engagement

## Improving our systems and processes: Little Steps

This year, we introduced Little Steps, a digital platform designed to reform how we capture data and use it in real time. The goal of this app is to improve the efficiency of centre operations, simplify the record keeping and archiving process, enable evidence-based research, better support care provision activities, and improve data-driven analytics.

Since the launch of this program, staff collect all of the children's data in real time from hand-held devices, with the data stored and retrieved with the minimum of keystrokes. The platform efficiently and effectively collects and collates information, enabling start data analytics. Overall, administration time has been decreased for our people, helping to focus delivery of services 'on the child', re-investing time back into the delivery of our service and curriculum to ensure better outcomes.

## Supporting education and development:

AEIOU delivered 16 webinars this year, directly supporting the parent training program and the AEIOU@Home initiative. COVID-19 affected the ability for parents and guardians to attend training sessions in person, with view rates of webinars increasing by more than 30% between the previous reporting period to now.

AEIOU Townsville also hosted a free community workshop which reached full subscription with a substantial waitlist, seeing a second event hosted the following month.

**Open Days and Excursions:** AEIOU centres opened their doors on 14 occasions for Open Day events, noting, Open Day events were postponed during 2020 due to COVID-19.

Our teams hosted seven excursion and incursion events for children across our services. This represents fewer community events than is typical, due to the impact of COVID-19 restricting community access.

**Improving communication:** We introduced a six-month trial of the Storypark app to share daily digital updates with families across five centres. This trial was delivered with pro bono support from Storypark and was taken up permanently in Adelaide and Sippy Downs where mainstream childcare services operate under AEIOU Foundation's banner.

## Understanding our client's journey:

This year, we undertook a 'client journey mapping' process to better understand the experiences of AEIOU families from expression of interest to transitioning to their next learning environment. This process included in-depth interviews with staff across the organisation and a number of families within our service. The information will inform improvements to our systems and processes in relation to end-to-end client experiences.

## Keeping our centres COVID-safe:

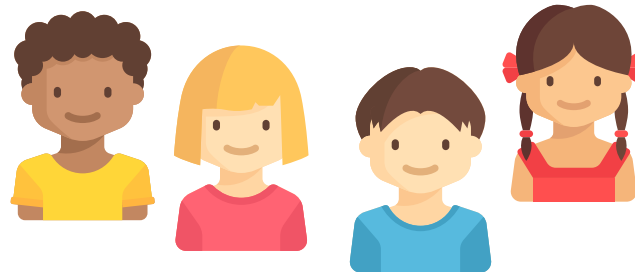
We implemented a variety of strategies to safeguard the health and wellbeing of families and people in response to the threat of COVID-19 community transmission. This included establishing new processes for dropping off and picking up children in the centres, establishing sanitising stations, temperature checking for all children, staff and guests, and following a variety of COVID-19 safety measures in line with the Government guidelines at all times.

*"Life is so different now. Even having both kids at home, and with everything going on with the COVID-19 pandemic, it was difficult. But that hasn't been anywhere near as difficult as the last year before we found AEIOU. Early intervention has changed Remy's life, and our life as a family. We're so proud of our little boy, and all he has achieved through the support of the team at AEIOU." – the Luscombe family*

## AEIOU@Home in support of families in self-isolation

The risks presented by the COVID-19 pandemic meant a significant percentage of families needed to self-isolate for a period of time. In response, AEIOU's senior therapists and educators established a new telehealth program that families could access online: AEIOU@Home. It consisted of one-to-one consultations and virtual classroom sessions with children, and their parents. Families shared positives, including the level of support made available, in addition to gaining new insight into how AEIOU's service operates, how the team works with children, and having an opportunity to engage with staff within the therapy space. AEIOU@Home has since supported families transitioning to a new centre in Toowoomba.

# Highlights: a year in review



- Commonwealth Bank awards AEIOU Centenary Grant of \$10,000.

- Parental Perspectives Study commences.
- Team Jacob Champions Challenge.

## July 2019

- AEIOU represented at the Sunshine Coast Disability Expo.
- Pro bono support from Hummingbird Research for a qualitative and quantitative survey of referring practitioners.

## September 2019

- Bundaberg centre expansion adds new classroom for 12 more children.
- AEIOU is the beneficiary at Melbourne Cup Events at Stokehouse and Emporium Southbank.
- Presented before a Parliamentary Steering Committee meeting for the NDIS.
- AEIOU represented at the Brisbane Disability Expo.

## November 2019

*“AEIOU has become a Queensland Great over the last 15 years, providing high quality intensive early intervention for thousands of children and their families. It is with great pride that I look back over the 15-year journey, and look forward to what the future holds.”*  
A/Prof James Morton AM



- AEIOU enrolls 184 new children across 10 services.
- Bald Hills centre opens to families.
- First steps towards introducing our reflective practice program to better support our frontline people.

## January 2020

## August 2019

- AEIOU Ambassador Alex Perry visits AEIOU Logan centre to meet staff and families.
- Presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Infants and Toddler Conference at Macquarie University on understanding Early Intervention for Very Young Children with Autism.



## October 2019

- 500 die-hard rockers attended the 5<sup>th</sup> annual Jurassic Jam raising \$50,000.
- Chain Reaction Women's 300.
- 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Take A Hike event held in Brisbane.
- Team Jacob Boutique Beer Lunch.
- AEIOU represented at the Adelaide Kids and Youth Disability Expo.

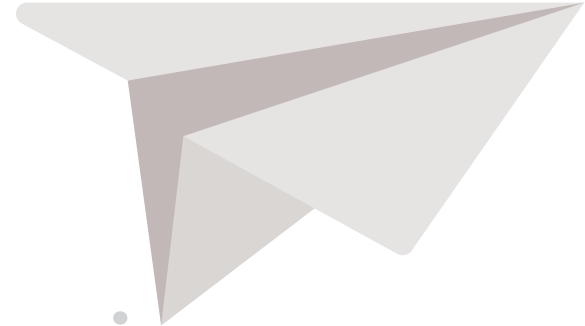


## December 2019

- Launch event of clinical guides to support children with minimal language, a culmination of two years' research collaboration with the National ASELCC network on a project led by AEIOU and Griffith University.







- Canberra Region centre sod turning event.
- Construction starts on Toowoomba redevelopment.
- Clinical guidelines launch in Adelaide.
- Commenced digitisation project to move client paper-based records to digital format.



- AEIOU@Home launched to support families self-isolating during COVID-19.
- The Lord Mayor's Charitable Trust provided 150 chocolate Easter eggs for children in our Brisbane centres.
- Brisbane's Story Bridge and City Hall were aglow in pink and blue light on World Autism Awareness Day, April 2.



## February 2020

## April 2020

## June 2020

- Provided AEIOU@Home to Toowoomba families during transition from temporary Goodstart Childcare centre back into refurbished AEIOU premises.
- AEIOU Founder & Patron A/Prof James Morton AM received Premier's Queensland Greats Award.



Image credit: The Courier-Mail

## May 2020

- Optimised the clinical leadership team, increasing the ratio of senior therapists to better support all centre staff, with the addition of a senior teacher.



## March 2020

- Bald Hills Centre Official Opening Ceremony.
- 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Take A Hike for Toowoomba.
- Inaugural Champions Challenge Extreme fundraising event launched by Team Jacob.
- Established a COVID-19 Continuity Committee and a programmed response to manage and safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of all staff and clients during the global health pandemic.



# Developments in *research*



## Our presentations

- “Understanding Early Intervention for Very Young Children with Autism”, presented by Dr Madonna Tucker at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Infants and Toddler Conference at Macquarie University on 19 and 20 July 2019.
- Clinical Guides to Support Children on the Autism Spectrum with Minimal Verbal Language, Brisbane, presented by Dr Madonna Tucker and A/Prof David Trembath, 12 November 2019.
- Clinical Guides to Support Children on the Autism Spectrum with Minimal Verbal Language, Adelaide, presented by Dr Madonna Tucker, Ms Joanne Stephen and Dr Grace Frost (South Australia Autism Specific Early learning and Care Centre), 4 February 2020.

## 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 Queensland University of Technology.

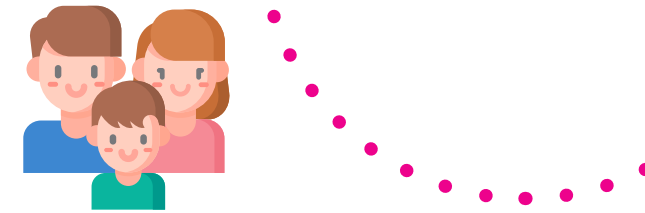


## Research collaborations

- “*Improving academic outcomes by moderating anxiousness in autism*”  
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.
- “Parent Perspectives of Early Intervention Services”. Investigators: Dr Madonna Tucker, Dr Kathleen Tait (University of Macquarie), and Dr Sophia Mavropolou (QUT). The project will explore parents’ understanding of early intervention services and their experiences while at AEIOU.
- “A longitudinal analysis of parental stress and challenging behaviour of young children with autism.” Investigators: Dr Vanessa Heng, Dr Jessica Paynter, (both from Griffith University) and Dr Madonna Tucker. The research aims to investigate the potential reciprocal links between parenting stress and challenging behaviour in children with ASD. Children with ASD tend to demonstrate more challenging behaviours than typically developing children, which has been shown to result in higher parenting stress. Furthermore, increased parenting stress has been associated with poorer child early intervention outcomes. However, few studies have examined the potential reciprocal relationship between parenting stress and challenging behaviour in children with ASD over time. Results from the research will be important in identifying risk factors to facilitate better outcomes for children and their parents.
- “Longitudinal social-communication outcomes in children with autism raised in bi/multilingual environments”. Investigators: Dr Samantha Siyambalapatiya, Dr David Trembath, and Dr Jessica Paynter, from Griffith University, Dr Vishnu Kaleeckal Krishnankutty Nair and Dr Christina Reuterskoid from New York University, and Dr Madonna Tucker, from AEIOU Foundation. Main purpose is to investigate if there are any differences in the social communication characteristics between children with autism raised in monolingual versus bilingual home environments.



# Understanding Parental perspectives



## Published research:

The big wide world of school: Supporting children on the autism spectrum to successfully transition to primary school: Perspectives from parents and early intervention professionals. *Scandinavian Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychology*. Volume 8, Pages 91-100, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21307/sjcapp-2020-009>. Chen, N., Miller, S., Milbourn, B., Black, M., Fordyce, K. Van Der Watt, G., Tasha Alach, T., Masi, A., Frost, G., Tucker, M., Eapen, V., & Girdler, S. (2020).

A Model of Practice for Building Teacher Capacity in Educating Young School-age Children on the Autism Spectrum: User Perspectives, *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, DOI: 10.1080/1034912X.2020.1774046. Beamish, W., Macdonald, L., Hay, S., Taylor, A., & Paynter, J., Tucker, M. (2020).

Clinician Proposed Predictors of Spoken Language Outcomes for Minimally Verbal Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disability*, DOI: 10.1007/s10803-020-04550-z. Trembath, D., Sutherland, R., Caithness, T., Dissanayake, C., Eapen, V., Fordyce, K., Frost, G., Iacono, T., Masi, A., Paynter, J., Pye, K., Reilly, S., Rose, V., Sievers, S., Westerveld, M., Thirumanickam, A., & Tucker, M. (2020).

Profiles of Vocalization Change in Children with Autism receiving Early Intervention, *Autism Research*, 00: 1-13. DOI:10.1002/aur.2075. Trembath, D., Westerveld, M., Teppala, S., Thirumanickam, A., Sulek, R., Rose, V., Tucker, M., Paynter, J., Hetzroni, O., Vivanti, G., & Keen, D. (2019).

This year, our Research and Assessment Team received a grant from the Collier Charitable Fund (CCF) to undertake a significant project to better understand the experiences of families raising a young child with autism. In addition to gaining insight into their experiences while at AEIOU centres, this study explored overall understanding of early intervention services.

Titled "Parent Perspectives of Early Intervention Services", the investigators were Dr Madonna Tucker (AEIOU), Dr Kathleen Tait (University of Macquarie), and Dr Sophia Mavropoulou (QUT).

Parents were asked a variety of questions, including where they sought information about autism, which professionals provided information to them and the most valuable skills their children had learned at AEIOU.

### The top 5 sources who provided information sources about autism:

1. Paediatrician 72.6%
2. Speech therapist 59.7%
3. Occupational therapist 51.6%
4. Psychologist 33.9%
5. Friend or relative 32.3%

### The top 3 professionals who provided information about autism-related early intervention services:

1. Paediatrician 75.8%
2. Speech therapist 40.3%
3. Occupational therapist 37.1%

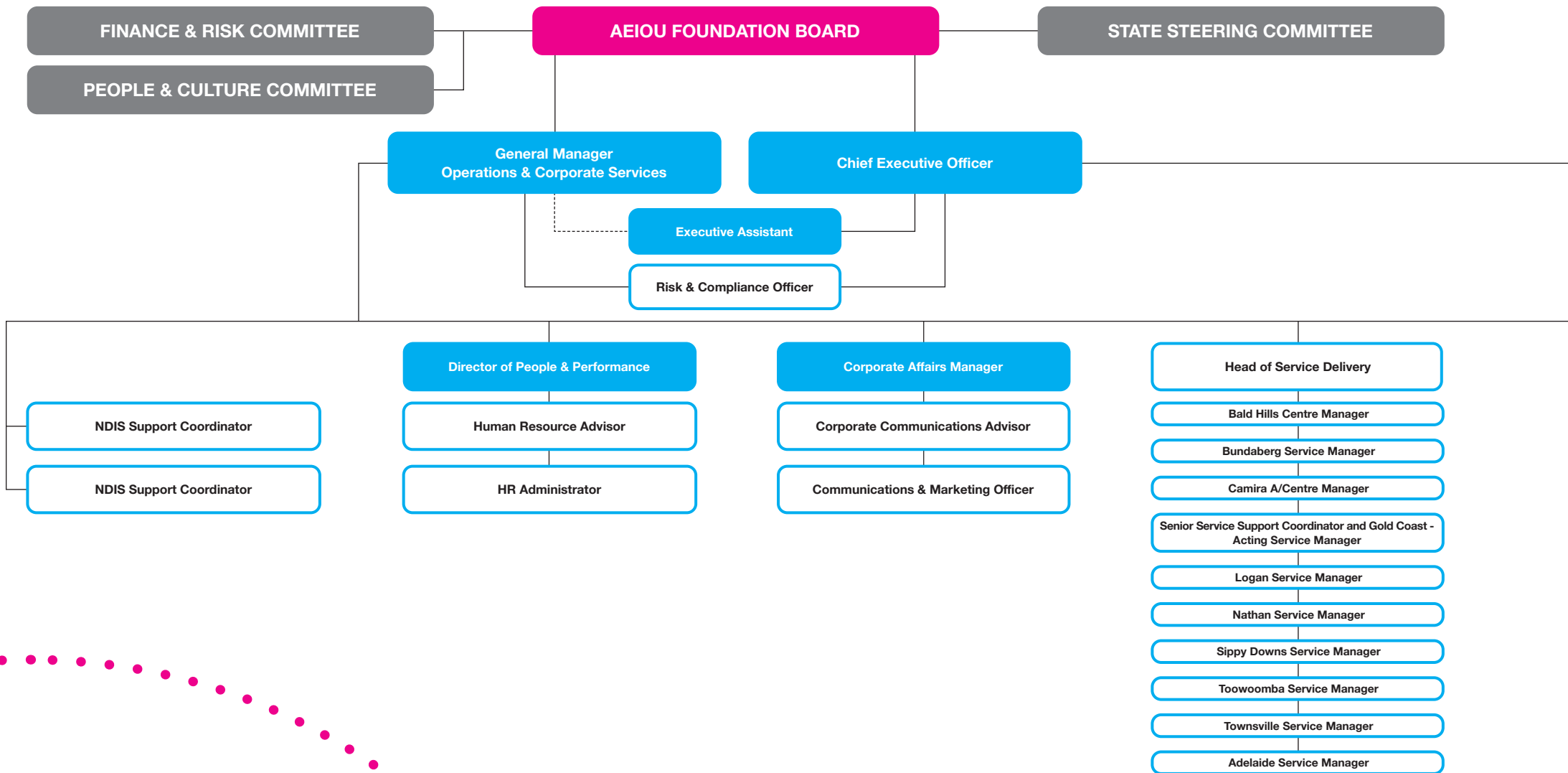
### The most valuable skill parents said their child had acquired, or is in the process of acquiring at AEIOU:

- |                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Communication 53%           |  |
| Social skills 40%           |  |
| Toilet training 18%         |  |
| Behaviour improvement 11%   |  |
| Independence - self care 3% |  |
| Other 5%                    |  |

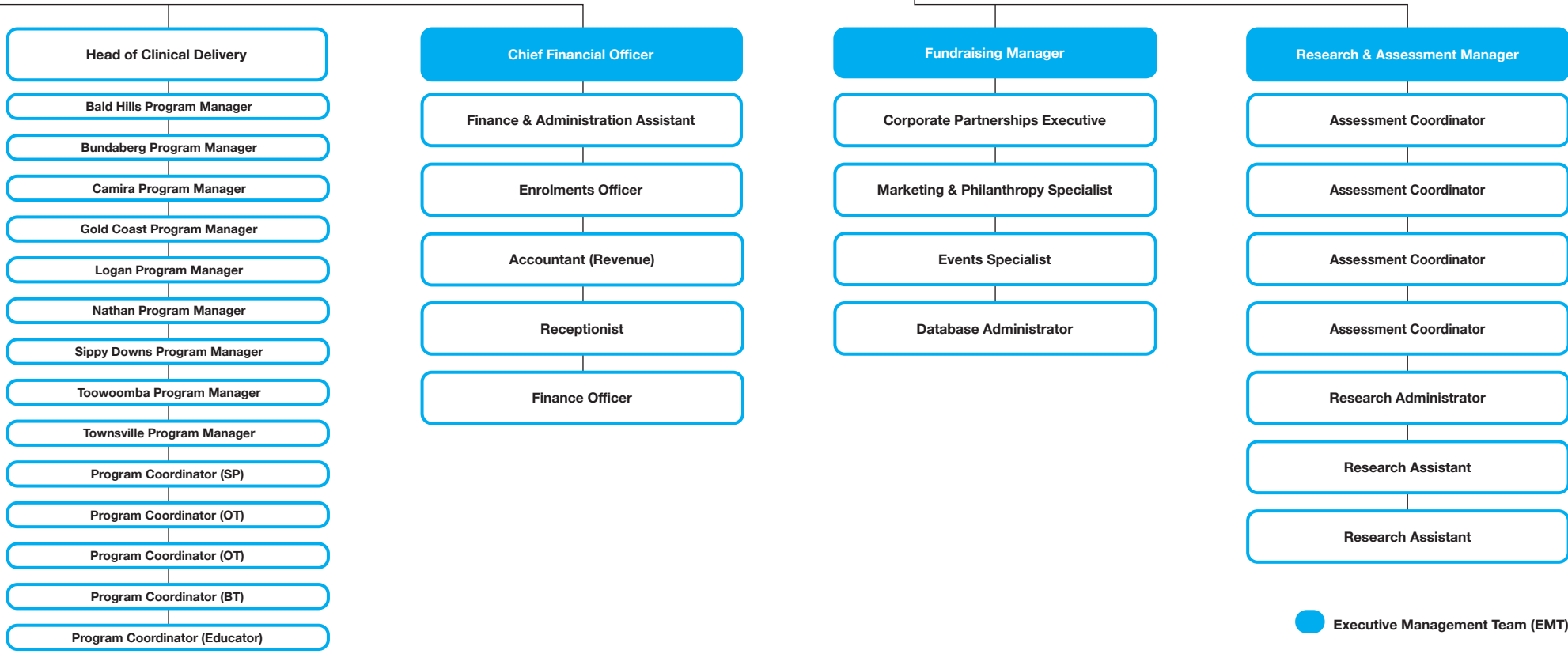
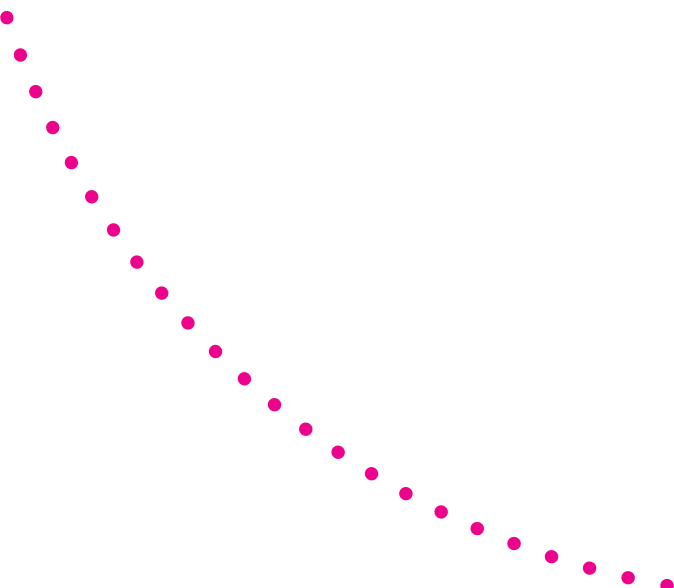
**AEIOU is known for its experienced staff, especially when it comes to supporting children with challenging behaviours.**

"The positive things that I have heard (from conversations with parents), are that the staff are very experienced with moderate to severe ASD, experienced in managing meltdowns, which might be triggered by sensory difficulties, so they were able to manage that quite easily with their experience and help these children learn to regulate their behaviour." (Paediatrician) via Hummingbird Insight.

# AEIOU Organisational Chart







 Executive Management Team (EMT)

# Summary financials

## Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income

For the Year Ended 30 June 2020	2020 \$	2019 \$
<b>Revenue and other income</b>		
Revenue from contracts with customers	19,092,453	12,094,850
Other revenue and income	9,404,288	6,953,128
	28,496,741	19,047,978
<b>Less: expenses</b>		
Employee benefits expense	(16,305,254)	(12,864,978)
Depreciation and amortisation expense	(1,277,918)	(902,322)
Repairs, maintenance and cleaning expenses	(568,646)	(444,745)
Occupancy expense	(181,029)	(395,858)
Event costs	(135,435)	(328,498)
Travel costs	(131,573)	(106,737)
Advertising expense	(178,783)	(166,510)
Insurance expense	(237,188)	(168,551)
Classroom and education	(160,977)	(156,221)
Professional services fees	(338,337)	(286,639)
Telecommunication expenses	(199,859)	(152,983)
Bad and doubtful debts	(63,282)	(265,633)
Loss on disposal of plant and equipment	(16,516)	(21,967)
Motor vehicle expenses	(27,630)	(56,595)
Finance costs	(69,950)	(42,295)
Other expenses	(1,265,529)	(828,299)
	(21,157,906)	(17,188,831)
<b>Surplus for the year</b>	7,338,835	1,859,147
<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)	-
	(764,093)	-
<b>Other comprehensive income for the year</b>	(764,093)	-
<b>Total comprehensive income</b>	6,574,742	1,859,147



## Statement of Financial Position

As at 30 June 2020

	2020 \$	2019 \$
<b>Current assets</b>		
Cash and cash equivalents	4,241,106	3,315,033
Receivables	1,554,048	578,528
Other assets	194,635	198,889
	<u>5,989,789</u>	<u>4,092,450</u>
Land and buildings classified as held for sale	1,200,000	-
<b>Total current assets</b>	<u>7,189,789</u>	<u>4,092,450</u>
<b>Non-current assets</b>		
Intangible assets	505,012	9,084
Lease assets	657,900	-
Property, plant and equipment	18,210,011	14,576,621
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<u>19,372,923</u>	<u>14,576,621</u>
<b>Total assets</b>	<u>26,562,712</u>	<u>18,669,071</u>
<b>Current liabilities</b>		
Payables	687,338	602,354
Lease liabilities	290,932	-
Borrowings	483,974	968,838
Provisions	915,298	663,930
Other liabilities	921,089	214,852
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<u>3,298,631</u>	<u>2,449,974</u>
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>		
Lease liabilities	452,353	-
Borrowings	40,515	41,157
Provisions	303,485	220,347
Other liabilities	-	64,607
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>	<u>796,353</u>	<u>326,111</u>
<b>Total liabilities</b>	<u>4,094,984</u>	<u>2,776,085</u>
<b>Net assets</b>	<u>22,467,728</u>	<u>15,892,986</u>
<b>Equity</b>		
Reserves	4,349,968	5,114,061
Retained surplus	18,117,760	10,778,925
<b>Total equity</b>	<u>22,467,728</u>	<u>15,892,986</u>

# Fundraising

AEIOU's fundraising mix includes an extensive calendar of events, managed by our talented events team and with support from our beneficiary partners. The summer of 2019-20 saw the most catastrophic bushfires of our time and this had an immediate impact on the grants and peer-to-peer fundraising spaces, with a widespread desire to focus on bushfire relief.

The first quarter of 2020 saw the planned events for the remainder of the financial year cancelled due to the changing landscape under the COVID-19 pandemic. This resulted in the projected events revenue decreasing by approximately 50% (\$600,000).

While events and initiatives were cancelled, the fundraising team was seconded to other areas of the business to provide hands-on support during the pandemic.

Despite these challenging times, with the support of our major partners and our friends in the community, AEIOU managed to recoup most of the lost revenue in these two areas, for which we are grateful.



## Our supporters









CELEBRATING 15 YEARS

**Registered office:**

3 Balaclava Street, Woolloongabba Q 4102

**Telephone:** 07 3320 7500 | **Facsimile:** 07 3320 7599

**Postal:** PO Box 8072 Woolloongabba Q 4102

**Email:** [info@aeiou.org.au](mailto:info@aeiou.org.au) | **Website:** [www.aeiou.org.au](http://www.aeiou.org.au)

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