



# Unlocking Potential Creating Possibility

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Autism Queensland 2024 Impact Report

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## Acknowledgement of Country

Autism Queensland (AQ) acknowledges the importance and value of the reconciliation journey with Traditional Owners and Owners of all the lands and waters on which we live and work.

We acknowledge the wisdom of Elders past and extend our respect for the valuable contributions of Elders present and those emerging leaders who willingly share cultural knowledge.

Our teams recognise the significance of connections between country and culture for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples as we walk together toward participation, opportunity and choice.



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# Chair's Message



*In 2024, the Autism Queensland (AQ) Board undertook a significant strategic review, resulting in a shift from a mission-based model to a purpose-driven framework that focuses on enriching lives and strengthening communities by empowering autistic people to reach their potential. This important transition sharpens our focus on what matters most: realising potential and creating possibilities for autistic Queenslanders. Our purpose provides a clearer signpost to achieving our vision, guiding strategic decision-making and resource allocation in an increasingly complex landscape.*

AQ operates in a dynamic environment, with transitions across the national disability, education and early childhood sectors. The long-anticipated outcomes of the NDIS Review began to take shape, ushering in both hope and uncertainty for the future of autism support in Australia. While the promise of a more equitable, needs-based system was welcomed, the transition process has left many families - particularly those seeking early intervention - facing

confusion, delays, and gaps in service access.

A state election brought changes in portfolios and policy direction, with potential implications for education, health and disability services. At the same time, rising cost-of-living pressures disproportionately impacted vulnerable families already navigating complex systems of support. Workforce shortages in both education and allied health, especially across regional areas, continued to

challenge service delivery and amplify existing inequities. Throughout the year, AQ remained focused on its purpose while adapting with agility, leading with evidence and advocating for autistic voices to be heard.

The Board maintained a strong focus on financial oversight and risk management. For the financial year end 31 December 2024, AQ reported a net loss of \$194k, a notable improvement from the 2023 result. Operating cash flows showed a positive turnaround of \$955K compared to an outflow of \$2.246 million in 2023. AQ's balance sheet remains strong, with net assets of \$17.161 million at the balance date.

Net income from fee-for-service activities declined during the year,

primarily due to margin compression in NDIS therapy services. This is due to increases in costs (including regulatory and compliance, insurance and wages) whilst NDIS pricing has been capped. Registered providers who support participants with more complex needs face additional financial challenges, which are amplified when delivering services in regional areas.

A revaluation of AQ's freehold property portfolio was conducted at year-end, resulting in a net increase of \$3.908 million — comprising a \$4.296 million increase in land values and a \$388,000 decrease in building values. As per accounting standards, this revaluation impacted AQ's reported financial result but



reflects sound asset stewardship. The overall financial result for the year reflects strong performance in the AQ School business, coupled with cost control measures implemented by management and overseen by the Board.

I am pleased to report continued growth in our education services, which in 2024 included construction of a new school campus on the Sunshine Coast and planning for two regional campuses in Mackay and Rockhampton which have since opened successfully. There was also a renewed focus on building partnerships with government agencies, community organisations and corporates through grant opportunities and consultancy services, extending our networks and impact beyond the NDIS. These

efforts are testament to the agility and resilience of the executive team and the entire organisation.

In 2024, we farewelled long-serving Chief Executive Officer Pam Macrossan. On behalf of the Board, I thank Pam for her exceptional leadership through some of AQ's most transformative and at times challenging years. Her impact was immense, and her legacy has shaped AQ's future.

We were delighted to appoint Frances Scodellaro as Chief Executive Officer. As former Chief Operations Officer, Frances brings deep organisational knowledge, strategic foresight and clarity, and a strong commitment to service innovation and inclusion.

I extend my sincere thanks to my fellow Directors for their wisdom

and commitment, and acknowledge the contributions of outgoing Board members Danielle Butcher, Alicia Tupack and Samantha Garbutt. My gratitude also goes to the wider AQ community — staff, partners, donors and supporters — for your shared belief in a more inclusive Queensland.

I remain confident in AQ's direction, proud of its people, and inspired by the potential we are unlocking together.



**Neil Makepeace**  
Chair, Autism Queensland Board



# CEO's Reflection

*It is a great honour to write my first reflection as CEO of Autism Queensland — an organisation I have been privileged to serve for many years, including five years as Operations Officer. I thank the Board for their trust, and pay special tribute to Pam Macrossan for her decade of outstanding leadership and dedication.*

In 2024, our purpose — unlocking potential and creating possibility — came to life in powerful ways. Across all our sites, and through the work of over 500 dedicated staff, we delivered high-quality, inclusive supports for autistic people of all ages.

We began the year with major milestones: the launch of Queensland's first autism-specific Distance Education program and the sod-turning of AQ School Brightwater — our first vertical campus on the Sunshine Coast. Our Autism Month campaign again united our community, while the launch of MYSET (My Sensory Experiences Tool) at Parliament House elevated AQ's research voice nationally and globally.

In the early childhood space, we

proudly delivered Queensland's Positive Behaviour Guidance pilot and continued to deliver the Kindergarten Inclusion Project. These programs support educators with trauma-aware, autism-informed strategies to build children's emotional wellbeing and inclusion.

AQ also completed a clean NDIS re-registration audit — a significant achievement that underscores our commitment to quality, safety, and accountability.

Beyond service delivery, AQ plays a growing leadership role nationally. As lead of the PlayConnect+ consortium, we supported over 2,100 young children through inclusive playgroups across Australia. We also contributed to the development of the National



Autism Strategy and provided submissions on Foundational Supports, ensuring lived experience and community needs remain central.

Innovation continues to be a hallmark of our work. In 2024, we launched the "Accommodate Us" toolkit to help Queensland's tourism industry deliver inclusive travel experiences. Our teams also partnered with local councils, educators, and architects to co-design autism-friendly spaces across Queensland.

It was a privilege to close the year at our annual Recognition Awards, hosted by AQ Patron and Queensland Governor, Her Excellency the Honourable Dr Jeannette Young AC PSM. These moments remind us why we do what we do.

To our incredible staff — thank you. Whether you're delivering therapy, teaching, coordinating projects, or supporting behind the scenes — your compassion, skill, and commitment are the heart of AQ. To our partners, clients, and families — thank you for your trust, your stories, and your ongoing collaboration.

Together, we will continue to create inclusive communities where autistic people are valued, supported, and celebrated.

**Frances Scodellaro**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Autism Queensland

# Our Why

## The Challenge

Despite growing awareness of autism, many autistic Queenslanders still face barriers that limit their access to education, health care, employment, and community participation. Many services and systems haven't kept pace with need. Long waitlists, gaps in support, and a lack of understanding can lead to exclusion, missed opportunities, and isolation — especially for those in regional areas. At AQ we are working to change this.

## The Data

- Education: One in three autistic primary students and nearly half of secondary students change schools due to lack of support.
- Diagnosis: Autism diagnoses have increased 41.8% since 2018, but access to assessments remains delayed — particularly in regional and remote Queensland.
- Mental Health: 66% of autistic people report suicidal thoughts, compared to 14% of the general population.
- Employment: 54% of autistic adults have never held a paid job, despite having qualifications.
- Community: 51% of autistic individuals and families report feeling socially isolated.
- Regional Disadvantage: Autistic people in regional areas are less than half as likely to access the NDIS compared to those in metropolitan areas.

## The Voices

“

Ryan feels like he belongs, and so do we. AQ School has changed our lives.”

**Bree**  
Parent of an AQ student

“

Connections4Women gave me a place to connect with others like me. It helped me feel seen.”

**Participant**  
Connections4Women

### Autism Queensland are members of the following:



## Our Vision

A life of participation, opportunity and choice.

## Our Purpose

Enriching lives and strengthening communities by empowering autistic people to reach their potential.

## Our Values

Our core values represent who we are and what is important to us. They embody what we do every day.

### Integrity & Authenticity

We are genuine, honest and accountable in all that we do.

### Diversity & Inclusion

We respect and celebrate all people and their right to participate and belong.

### Strengths Focus

We strive to support the development of every person's potential, recognising that a strengths focus enables growth and empowers decision-making and self-advocacy.

### Safety & Wellbeing

We provide and promote safe, respectful, caring and engaging people and environments that support positive development and relationships.

### Evidence-Informed Practice

We use professional reasoning to bring together current high quality research evidence and the values, strengths and preferences of individuals and families to optimise outcomes.



## Our Strategic Goals

- ▶ Prioritise the safety and wellbeing of our clients, communities and workforce.
- ▶ Continuously improve the quality and safety of Autism Queensland's services and products by placing customer experience and innovation at the heart of operations.
- ▶ Raise awareness, influence and lead policy reform that creates lasting benefits for autistic people and the community.
- ▶ Build and support a high performing workforce.
- ▶ Ensure long term financial sustainability.

# Your First Call – The AQ Helpline

*Ensuring no one is left to navigate autism alone.*

As Queensland's peak autism body, AQ supports thousands of individuals, families, and professionals each year — not only through direct service delivery, but also by answering questions, offering guidance, and connecting people to the right supports.

In 2024, our Helpline and Client Services Team responded to more than 10,000 enquiries, including requests for service information, guidance on the diagnostic process, NDIS navigation, education supports, and more.

We proudly support a community that includes:



Autistic people aged 1 to 70+



Families and carers



Schools, kindergartens, and early childhood services



Educators, teachers and support staff



Employers and businesses



Allied health and medical professionals



Disability service providers and support coordinators



Local, state, and federal government agencies



Funders, researchers, and donors

# The Right Support at the Right Time

*Early Support, Lifelong Impact: Right time, right support, right impact*

## Why It Matters

Access to the right supports changes lives. But across Queensland, many autistic people and their families still face long wait times and limited access to support. At AQ, we deliver personalised, evidence-based therapy, assessment and services that support autistic people across the lifespan.



## Services Spotlight

### EarlyAQtion

Delivered across Queensland, EarlyAQtion supports autistic children up to school age through a flexible, holistic model aligned with our Early Years Framework. Supports are tailored to the needs of each child and family, and in 2024 included:

- Individual therapy (OT, speech, psychology).
- Parent coaching.
- Inclusion and transition supports.
- Short-term therapy groups.

### Our Impact In 2024

- 17 early childhood groups were delivered monthly across AQ centres.
- An average of 83 children participated in these groups each month.

### Therapy & Diagnostic

Our team of experienced psychologists, speech pathologists and occupational therapists deliver tailored supports for children, adolescents, and adults — including diagnostic assessments, developmental screenings, and cognitive testing.

### Our Impact In 2024

- Significant investment was made to reduce wait times.
- Over 15,000 hours of individual therapy were delivered.
- Regional families were supported through fly-in, fly-out visits and telehealth services.



# Education That Includes Everyone

*Every child deserves an education that recognises their strengths and supports their needs — no matter how they learn, or what support they need.*

## The AQ Approach

AQ is Queensland's leading provider of autism-specific education and inclusion services.

We support students directly through our AQ School campuses and Queensland's first autism-specific Distance Education program. We also work in partnership with thousands of early childhood and school educators across the state, helping them create classrooms where all students can thrive.

Whether it's delivering classroom supports in Bamaga, building the capacity of kindy staff in Mornington Island, or guiding a student in Cairns back into learning, our goal is always the same: to ensure every child feels safe, supported, and valued.



AQ School campuses deliver the Australian Curriculum Learning Areas from Foundation to Year 10, and The Queensland Certificate of Individual Achievement (QCIA) pathway for

Years 11–12. Our teachers personalise every learning program, tailoring the curriculum to each student's age, strengths, interests and individual learning needs.

Consultation and collaboration with stakeholders including the student, parents and carers, the AQ School interdisciplinary team and shared enrolled school teams enhance students' access to and engagement with learning,

## Our Impact In 2024

- Operated three autism-specific campuses (Sunnybank Hills, Brighton & Cairns).
- Delivered Queensland's first autism-specific Distance Education program.
- Supported 185 students across 31 AQ School classrooms from Prep to Year 12.
- Completed construction of AQ School Brightwater — a purpose-designed inclusive campus.
- Began planning for new campuses in Mackay and Rockhampton (opening 2025).

## Services Spotlight

### AQ School Brightwater

AQ School Brightwater is our first purpose-built school. Co-designed with students, families, and professionals, every detail — from the curved walls that guide transitions, to sensory-responsive learning spaces and zoned playscapes — has been designed to support regulation, safety, and belonging. The campus goes beyond compliance with Australian Standards by embedding inclusive design principles throughout.

“

AQ School has been good for all of us, not just Ryan.”



“

Their sensory needs will be catered for, the educational adjustments and the support that's going to be available to them... They're just going to absolutely love it.”

**Parent**



## Ryan's Story

By Year Two, Ryan had stopped attending school altogether. His mum Bree had given up work to support him at home. Everything changed when he started at AQ School Sunnybank Hills.

“Having educators who understand how Ryan learns has made all the difference,” says Bree. “He feels like he belongs — and so do we.”

Now, Ryan is talking about university, caring for the family's adopted greyhound, and rediscovering his love of learning.

## Kindergarten Inclusion

We are proud to be the state's largest provider of the Queensland Government-funded Kindergarten Inclusion Service (KIS). This program increases access to kindy for children with additional needs and strengthens inclusive practices in early learning settings.



## School Advisory Service

We are the largest provider of the Specialist Disability Support in Schools (SDSS) Program, funded by the Queensland Government. Our teams of specialist teachers and therapists deliver practical, tailored strategies to educators, other professionals, and parents.

“

AQ staff quickly formed a rapport with the parents and staff. They listened carefully and offered practical suggestions that were realistic for families and busy classrooms.”

**School Principal**

### Our Impact In 2024

- ▶ Visited 360 kindergartens across Queensland.
- ▶ Delivered supports in regional and remote locations including Bedourie, Cunnamulla, Mount Isa, Roma, Taroom, Cooktown and Charleville.
- ▶ Launched the KIS Online Resource Hub — featuring videos, blogs, and downloadable tools.
- ▶ Over 90% of educators reported improved confidence to support autistic students.

### Our Impact In 2024

- ▶ Delivered 1,502 services to 426 schools and 1,337 students.
- ▶ Reached schools as far as the Torres Strait Islands, Weipa, Charleville, Burketown, and Stanthorpe — including schools with as few as 13 students.
- ▶ Developed classroom-wide strategies that promote inclusion.

“

Educators don't feel judged. The consultant challenged me to ask questions and now I include that.”

Together, these services reflect AQ's unwavering commitment to inclusion — not just in our own schools, but across every kindergarten, school, and community in Queensland.

## Behaviour Guidance

AQ was appointed by the Queensland Government as part of the Early Childhood Guidance program to deliver the innovative Positive Behaviour Guidance Pilot. The project equips early childhood educators with the skills and confidence to use positive, developmentally appropriate strategies to support emotional wellbeing and behaviour in young children — with an autism-informed, trauma-aware approach.

### Our Impact In 2024

- ▶ Delivered 36 workshops across Queensland to 448 educators.
- ▶ Ongoing professional development delivered beyond the pilot.
- ▶ Educators reported sustained increases in confidence and practical skills.
- ▶ Delivered both in-person and online to maximise access in remote areas.

“

The consultant gave me renewed hope, renewed patience, and practical strategies. Every child has made improvement because of this service.”

**Educator**



# Fostering Wellbeing & Belonging

*Everyone deserves to feel understood, supported, and well.*

## The AQ Approach

AQ supports wellbeing at every age through therapeutic supports, early childhood intervention, mental health training, and group therapy designed to build confidence, social connection and emotional regulation. We also help build the capacity of educators, therapists, GPs and service providers to respond more effectively to the mental health needs of autistic people.

Autistic people experience significantly higher rates of anxiety, depression and suicide — yet most mental health services are not autism-informed or neurodiversity-affirming. At AQ, we are working to change this.



## The Data

- ▶ 50–70% of autistic people experience co-occurring mental health conditions.
- ▶ Autistic people are 7x more likely to avoid healthcare due to past trauma or lack of understanding.
- ▶ In 2024, AQ delivered mental health training to 720 professionals through the *Autism & Mental Health Project*.
- ▶ 100% of participants said the information was useful in their work.



## Spotlight

### Autism & Mental Health

Funded by the Australian Government, Department of Social Services, this AQ project delivers workshops for psychologists, therapists, general practitioners and mental health services. Topics include autism and trauma, demand avoidance, stress, co-occurring mental health diagnoses, and communication strategies.

### Therapy Groups & Social Programs

AQ delivered over 2,950 hours of therapy for participants attending therapy groups in 2024 — including groups focused on emotional regulation, anxiety support, goal setting, and social confidence for children, young people and adults.

## Spotlight

### Kids Connection Groups

In 2024, more than 7,140 hours of support were delivered through AQ's Kids Connection Groups. Across the school holidays, 231 children aged 5–17 found a safe, supportive space to connect with peers, build communication skills, and grow in confidence — all through play-based activities that made learning fun.

“

This was one of the best workshops I've attended. It challenged how I think about support and gave me practical tools I can use straight away.”

Workshop participant



## Liam's Story: From Hangout to Hired

Two years ago, Liam joined The Hangout group therapy group after working with one of AQ's Senior Occupational Therapists on his personal goals. She recognised that Liam would benefit from a group setting where he could continue developing his social confidence and life skills — and she was right.

Held at AQ's Sunnybank Hills, The Hangout – Southside runs twice a week. One session is dedicated to cooking, planning outings, socialising, and exploring important life topics like money management, employment, relationships, and understanding autism. The second is community-based — where participants head out to enjoy real-world experiences together.

Over the past two years, Liam has been part of a group that's explored everything from mini-golf and rock climbing to BBQs in the park, bowling arcades, restaurants — and even a cat café or two.

When Liam first joined, he was working weekends and set a clear goal for his time at The Hangout: to meet new people and build meaningful connections. He also wanted to grow his self-advocacy

skills. As his confidence grew, so did his goals — including cooking independently and organising social outings outside the group.

Liam made strong friendships within the group and began planning his own catchups, gradually needing less support as his independence grew. Soon, he was sharing stories of weeknight movie nights and getting early morning calls from mates inviting him to Broncos games.



Today, Liam is a proud Hangout graduate. He's secured full-time employment with a landscaping company — a job that aligns perfectly with his interests and strengths. He's thriving in his new role, connecting well with colleagues, and now has weekends free for even more NRL games with friends.

We are incredibly proud of you, Liam. Thank you for letting us be part of your journey — and for reminding us of what's possible when the right supports are in place.

# Empowering Through Employment

*Helping autistic people find meaningful work, and helping workplaces become more inclusive.*

## The Challenge

For many autistic adults, securing meaningful employment remains a challenge — not due to lack of skill, but because of inaccessible recruitment practices, workplace discrimination, and limited support. Autistic people face one of the highest unemployment rates of any disability group. At AQ, we know employment changes lives.

## Our Approach

AQ delivers a dual strategy for change:

- Empower autistic individuals through tailored support, workplace coaching and confidence-building.
- Partner with employers to provide training, inclusive onboarding.

We work with large employers, small businesses and local councils to help them recruit and retain autistic employees. Our strengths-based services are built on evidenced, co-designed materials and a commitment to lasting inclusion, not just short-term placements.

## Our Impact In 2024

- ▶ 583 autistic employees supported through Neurodiversity Works (NDW).
- ▶ 31 businesses and organisations partnered with AQ to promote inclusive employment.
- ▶ 41 Queensland companies completed neurodiversity training — reaching almost 590 employees.
- ▶ 108+ autistic adults placed in employment through Autism EmployABLE.
- ▶ 72% of participants achieved 6+ months sustained employment — nearly double the national DES average of 37%.
- ▶ AQ School supports senior students transitioning into the workforce to set goals and plan

## JT's Story

JT first connected with AQ's Autism EmployABLE service in 2023 and secured a job as a tradesperson while studying laboratory science. When the role ended due to business downturn, he reached out again.

His Employment Engagement Officer supported JT with consistent job search strategies — and soon he landed his dream role: Lab Assistant, testing building materials.

The story doesn't stop there.

JT's employer was so impressed that they offered a second placement for another AQ participant. JT even helped show the new team member around the site — becoming a peer mentor in the process.

“

JT now works in a field that matches both his interests and his studies. His story shows what's possible when autistic job seekers get the right support — and when workplaces are open to neurodiverse talent.”

**AQ Employment Engagement Officer**



# Research & Innovation

*Advancing evidence-informed practice, co-designed solutions, and system reform.*

AQ has a long-standing commitment to driving innovation through research and practice-based evidence. Our dedicated Research & Development team works in collaboration with autistic people, families, practitioners, and researchers to co-create tools, conduct applied research, and embed findings into service delivery. In 2024, we continued to lead and contribute to national conversations on best practice, accessibility, and inclusion.

## My Sensory Experiences Toolkit (MYSET)

In April 2024, we proudly launched the My Sensory Experiences Tool (MYSET) — a co-designed resource that empowers autistic people to express how sensory environments impact their wellbeing, particularly in healthcare and education settings.

Developed by AQ's Head of Research, Dr Jill Ashburner, and her team, MYSET was created in partnership with autistic people, clinicians, educators and parents. It enables



“

MYSET gives me a way to explain what's hard to say. It helps others understand me — without needing to guess.”

**Autistic participant**

users to communicate sensory needs and preferences, advocate for accommodations, and reduce stress in environments that can otherwise be overwhelming.

The launch event, hosted at Queensland Parliament House, featured speakers from across the sector, including AQ Patron Her Excellency the Honourable Dr Jeannette Young ACPSM, clinicians, researchers, and lived experience representatives. The tool has already gained national and international recognition.

## Our Impact In 2024

MYSET was adopted by:

- Healthcare clinics, schools, and disability service providers.
- Mental health services participating in AQ's Autism & Mental Health Project.
- Researchers exploring new applications in trauma-informed care.

## Spotlight: 2024 Publications

AQ researchers contributed to the evidence base in autism-specific education, employment, and person-centred support. Published works included:

- **Ashburner, J., Glastonbury, E., Bobir, N., Sanders, D., Swift, E., Rietberg, E., & Hill, J. (2024)**

*“In Search of a Good Person-to-Job Fit: Perspectives of Autistic Clients, Their Family Members, and Employers of a Pilot Autism-Specific Employment Program.”*

Published in *Autism in Adulthood*, July 2024.

- **Hill, J., Copley, J., Donovan, S., Ashburner, J., Taylor, J., & Bobir, N. (2024)**

*“What supports do autistic adolescents and adults need? Perspectives of self-reporting adults and caregivers.”*

Published in *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal*, Volume 71, Issue 6.

These publications reflect AQ's commitment to ensuring lived experience, practitioner expertise, and rigorous research work together to improve the lives of autistic people.

# Building Autism-Informed Healthcare

*Creating safer, more accessible medical and health services for autistic people.*

## The Challenge

Autistic people experience significantly poorer health outcomes — not because of their neurology, but because our healthcare systems aren't designed with them in mind.

From overwhelming waiting rooms to communication misunderstandings and rushed appointments, too many autistic people avoid medical settings altogether. This can lead to untreated conditions, trauma, and, tragically, much shorter life expectancy.

AQ is working to change this by building autism-informed health systems — through training, advocacy, research, and tools that centre-lived experience.

## AQ Driving Systems Change

### 2019–2021

Contributed to Autism CRC research on inclusive health service design.

### 2022

Co-authored submissions highlighting the need for autism-informed healthcare in NDIS reforms.

### 2023

Began development of the My Sensory Experiences Tool (MYSET) — a practical innovation to support autistic people in health reforms.

### 2024

- ▶ Launched MYSET at Queensland Parliament House.
- ▶ Delivered professional training to health practitioners through the Autism & Mental Health Project.
- ▶ Advocated through submissions to the National Autism Strategy for better access and equity in healthcare.
- ▶ Partnered with families, professionals and researchers to embed lived experience into system design.

## Building Workforce Capability

To improve health outcomes for autistic people, we are building the capability of the healthcare workforce. Our targeted, autism-informed training equipped hundreds of GPs, psychologists and mental health services with knowledge, tools, and insights to deliver more inclusive, responsive care.

“

This session helped me rethink how I approach autistic clients — especially in high-stress environments.”

**Health Professional**

## Our Impact In 2024

- ▶ 720+ professionals trained.
- ▶ 29 workshops delivered.
- ▶ 100% of attendees said the training would inform their practice.
- ▶ Training co-designed with autistic adults, parents and professionals.



## The Future

We imagine a Queensland where every health service from a GP to an emergency room is autism informed. AQ is helping shape a healthcare system where autistic people feel safe, heard, and respected.

# Supporting Autistic Adults

*Empowering voices, building connections, creating change.*

AQ is committed to supporting autistic people across the lifespan — and that means ensuring adults, including women and those newly diagnosed, have access to inclusive, informed, and meaningful support.

Too often, autistic adults — particularly women — are overlooked, underdiagnosed, or left without appropriate services. Many navigate years of misunderstanding before receiving the support they need. We are working to change this through peer-led initiatives, accessible therapy and group programs, inclusive community engagement, and co-designed innovation.

## Spotlight

### Connections4Women

In August 2024, AQ was awarded funding through the Department of Social Services' Strong and Resilient Communities program to deliver a new social connection initiative for autistic women aged 18 and over.

Named Connections4Women, the project is designed to address barriers to inclusion and foster meaningful, lasting peer support networks. Co-designed with lived experience at its core, the program offers safe, welcoming spaces where autistic women can connect, share experiences, and build community.

During the final quarter of 2024, extensive groundwork was undertaken to prepare for the program's 2025 rollout. This included participant consultations, development of co-designed resources and workbooks, and the establishment of program structures for weekly, fortnightly and monthly groups in Brisbane, Gladstone, Toowoomba and online.

The enthusiasm already shown by prospective participants confirms what we know to be true — that authentic, peer-led connection can be life changing.



“

It's life changing to know I'm not alone.”

### Meet Our Residents



**DS**, has a lifelong passion for trucks and looks forward to attending the Brisbane Truck Show each year. It's more than a day out — it's a valued opportunity to connect with others who share his interest, feel a sense of belonging, and experience a fulfilling day in a space that aligns with his passions.



**CP**, an AQ SIL resident, visited Dreamworld in 2024 and enjoyed it so much he bought a season pass. Knowing he'd return for more fun-filled days brought him joy and pride.

AQ is commitment to ensuring every autistic adult regardless of their support needs can live with dignity, autonomy, and connection.

### Independent Living & Community Access

AQ's Community Services team supports autistic adults to live independently in their own homes across south-east Queensland. This personalised support helps individuals build daily living skills, enjoy meaningful community engagement, and live life on their own terms.

#### Our Impact In 2024

- 19 clients received 24/7 in-home support across 10 residences.
- The team delivered 1,961 days of in-home support.
- Over 20,100 hours of community access support were delivered — including evenings, weekends and public holidays.

# Building Inclusive Communities

*Creating spaces where everyone belongs.*

At AQ, inclusion is more than just a value — it's a practice. We work alongside communities, organisations, and industries to co-design environments that are welcoming, accessible, and responsive to the needs of autistic and neurodivergent people.

In 2024, we continued to lead initiatives that help shift attitudes, remove barriers, and ensure every autistic Queenslander can participate fully in community life.

## Spotlight

### Accommodate Us: Making Tourism Inclusive

This year we proudly launched the Accommodate Us Toolkit — a co-designed resource that supports accommodation providers to deliver inclusive travel experiences for neurodivergent guests.

Funded through the Queensland Government's Accessible Tourism Enablers Grant, the project brought together autistic people, families, and industry professionals to identify common barriers and practical solutions. We partnered with Cedar Creek Lodges, Crystalbrook Vincent, Daydream Island Resort, Paradise

Resort and Pullman Brisbane to ensure the Toolkit met the needs of both industry and community.

Freely available on the AQ website and through tourism groups and regional networks, the Toolkit includes:

- Walk-and-talk site audits of diverse accommodation providers.
- Feedback from neurodivergent travellers.
- Inclusive design recommendations & case studies.
- Videos, downloadable tip sheets, and a self-assessment checklist.



“

A truly inclusive space moves beyond compliance. It's about recognising what people need to feel safe, welcomed and understood — and designing with that in mind.”

### Professional Learning & Parent Education

At AQ, inclusion begins with understanding. Our 2024 suite of workshops and webinars were designed to empower those who live with, support, and work alongside autistic people — from parents and carers to teachers, therapists, employers, and community organisations. These practical, accessible sessions are grounded in evidence and lived experience. By equipping people with the right knowledge, we help dismantle the social, educational, and systemic barriers that autistic people often face.

### Our Impact In 2024

- 168 workshops and webinars delivered in locations including Brisbane, Kingaroy, Dalby, Gladstone, Gold Coast, Warwick, Maryborough, Cairns and Rockhampton.
- 1,400+ participants engaged in sessions including Understanding Autism; Autism, Stress & Anxiety; Supporting Self-Regulation and more.

*“Since the workshop, our leaders feel more confident and are now speaking openly with families. It's changing the culture — and making a real difference for our kids.”*

### Scouts Project: Supporting Inclusive Youth

Between 2021 and 2024, AQ partnered with Scouts Queensland to deliver tailored training for scout leaders and volunteers. Funded by the Australian Government's Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grant, the Project aimed to build understanding of autism and provide practical, easy-to-implement strategies to create more inclusive scouting experiences.

### Our Impact In 2024

- Leaders received training on communication, sensory needs, and inclusive group management.
- Tip sheets, visual supports, and lived experience videos were co-developed and shared as legacy resources.
- The project sparked broader conversations among leaders, increasing awareness and inclusion across the state.



# Reaching Regional & Remote QLD

*Ensuring every autistic Queenslander can access support — no matter where they live.*

For autistic people and their families living outside major centres, accessing diagnosis, education, and support can be incredibly difficult. Long travel times, workforce shortages, and limited local services can lead to delays in intervention and increased isolation.

AQ is committed to closing these gaps. Through a network of regional centres, fly-in-fly-out supports, telehealth services, and community outreach, we're helping ensure where a person lives doesn't determine the quality or timeliness of the support they receive.

## Our Statewide Footprint



### Our Impact In 2024

- ▶ AQ delivered services to 90+ Queensland communities.
- ▶ We had centres in Cairns, Mackay, Rockhampton, Gladstone, Brisbane and the Gold Coast.
- ▶ Remote outreach and telehealth services reached communities including Doomadgee, Mornington Island, Weipa, Thursday Island, Charleville, Cherbourg, and Eulo.

## Local Knowledge. Statewide Impact.

Our regional teams are local professionals with deep roots in their communities. Their understanding of local needs, cultures and service gaps helps ensure AQ's services are relevant, respectful and effective. Here are just a few of the incredible staff members making a difference on the ground:



### Kirsty Petersen – Gladstone

*Positive Behaviour Guidance Facilitator & Senior Early Years Inclusion Consultant*

With more than 25 years' experience in the regional early years sector, Kirsty has worked across early intervention, therapy, and inclusive practice. She's passionate about empowering educators with practical, strengths-based strategies that build connection and confidence — especially in



### Tanya Kunzler – Cairns

*Senior Psychologist & Manager Therapy Services*

Tanya has been with AQ since 2012. She supports families across Far North Queensland using a trauma-informed, neurodiversity-affirming approach that incorporates Play Therapy, ACT, and mindfulness. Her work helps bridge clinical knowledge with local understanding.



### Cynthia Donato – Gold Coast

*Senior Early Years Inclusion Consultant*

Cynthia brings 15+ years of experience working with families of young children. Her work is deeply rooted in building trust, wellbeing, and connection — always with a holistic and neurodiversity-affirming lens.



### Brooke Carmody – Cairns

*Head of Regional Campuses*

Originally from Victoria, Brooke has 20 years of teaching experience and now leads AQ's northern education campuses. She describes joining AQ School as "the best decision I've ever made," and is proud to see how inclusive education is transforming families' lives in regional Queensland.

# AQ Across Australia

*Driving National Inclusion Through Local Partnerships.*

## PlayConnect+ Playgroups

As the national lead of the **PlayConnect+ Playgroup program**, AQ partners with State and Territory Playgroup Associations and other state autism associations to coordinate inclusive playgroups for children aged birth to 8 years with disability or developmental concerns — and their families, carers and siblings.

Funded by the Australian Government under the **National Early Childhood Program (NECP)**, PlayConnect+ creates welcoming spaces that empower parents and nurture early social, emotional, and communication development in young children.

“

It's the only space where I feel like I don't need to explain my child. People just get it.”

**PlayConnect+ Parent**

## Our Impact In 2024

- ▶ 3900+ playgroups were delivered nationally.
- ▶ 2100 young children and 1600 parents/carers participated.
- ▶ 72 First Nations families from remote communities including Doomadgee, Thursday Islands, Ngukurr and South Arnhem Land accessed support.
- ▶ 80%+ of caregivers reported feeling supported, heard, and confident that their child's needs were understood.



# Community & Fundraising Highlights

*Celebrating the generosity, creativity and connection that power our purpose.*

In 2024, our community of supporters — from fundraisers and volunteers to artists and ambassadors — made a vibrant impact. Whether lighting up buildings, walking for change, or painting murals with students, every contribution played a part in creating a more inclusive and compassionate Queensland for autistic people.

## Autism Month: A Statewide Show of Colour

In April, we marked Autism Month with a series of bold, beautiful displays of community spirit.

Bridges and buildings across Brisbane, Townsville, Rockhampton, Fraser Coast and Gladstone lit up in bright colours to raise awareness and show support for autistic Queenslanders. Our AQtion for Autism Day brought together schools, businesses and individuals for free dress days, workplace events, morning teas, and social media campaigns.

We were deeply moved by the creativity and commitment of our community supporters!



## 10K or 10 Your Way

October saw the return of 10K or 10 Your Way, with more than 100 participants and 24 teams stepping up for autism inclusion. From 10km walks and bike rides to yoga challenges and gym circuits, each participant put their own spin on the event.

Together, they raised nearly \$40,000 — making it one of the most successful grassroots fundraisers in AQ's recent history.

A heartfelt thanks to our generous sponsors — Viatris, OneTeam IT, Macquarie Technology, and HOYTS — for helping make this possible.

## Bringing joy and raising funds each Christmas

Sue and Gordon Begent have been bringing Christmas joy to the Rockhampton community for many years with their Christmas light display. And over the past five years have also raised thousands of dollars for our Rockhampton centre through this annual spectacular. Thank you Sue and Gordon for the joy you bring to the community each Christmas and your continued support of the Rockhampton centre.



## Trivia Night Thank You

Ben was a beautiful, happy baby. But as he approached toddlerhood, his parents began to notice challenges that just weren't going away. At age 4, Ben was diagnosed with autism. He started at mainstream primary school, but every day was a battle. It was really hard. In 2022 everything changed when he started at AQ School Sunnybank Hills as a part-time student. By 2024 he was enrolled full-time and thriving. Ben's mum Bronwyn and aunt Kerryn decided they wanted to say thanks by holding a Trivia Night. With the help of Ben's family, friends, community, and the Hooper-Shaw Foundation, the night was a huge success!

## A Mural of Memories at AQ School Brighton

In October, artist and AQ Ambassador Martin Edge returned to our Brighton campus — the very school he attended as a student 30 years ago — to collaborate with students and staff on a colourful mural project.

Together, they brought new life to the walls of the school, creating a vibrant celebration of belonging, creativity, and pride. The project was not only a powerful moment of reconnection for Martin, but a reminder of how much has changed — and how far we've come — in autism education and inclusion.

“

It was so special to see Martin working alongside our students — showing them what's possible and reminding them they belong.”

AQ School staff member



## Disney's Beauty and the Beast

AQ was privileged and proud to play a part in the relaxed performance of Disney's Beauty and the Beast the Musical at Brisbane's Queensland Performing Arts Centre (QPAC) on Saturday 11 May. By providing volunteers for the event and promoting ticket sales to our community, we helped create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all attendees. It was a wonderful event, and our staff who volunteered

their time were deeply touched to see the joy on the faces of the 1000 or so guests. This special performance allowed attendees to have a fantastic experience while enjoying being their authentic autistic selves. Seeing our community embrace such events and feel truly comfortable was a heartwarming reminder of why we do what we do.

# Statement of Financial Position

As at 31 December 2024

	2024	2023	2024	2023
	\$	\$	\$	\$
<b>Current assets</b>				
Cash & cash equivalents	3,400,066	2,042,836		
Trade & other receivables	462,401	858,649		
Prepayments	861,277	933,595		
Other financial assets	429,872	221,595		
<b>Total current assets</b>	<b>5,153,616</b>	<b>4,056,675</b>		
<b>Non-current assets</b>				
Property, plant & equipment	23,482,290	21,386,826		
Financial assets	290,697	21,357		
<b>Total non-current assets</b>	<b>23,772,987</b>	<b>21,408,183</b>		
<b>Total assets</b>	<b>28,926,603</b>	<b>25,464,858</b>		
<b>Current liabilities</b>				
Trade and other payables	3,614,828	3,864,454		
Financial liabilities	4,372,462	4,245,876		
Lease liabilities	28,813	143,926		
Provisions	3,137,433	3,009,546		
<b>Total current liabilities</b>	<b>11,153,536</b>	<b>11,263,802</b>		
<b>Non-current liabilities</b>				
Lease liabilities			5,264	555,644
Provisions			606,283	585,733
<b>Total non-current liabilities</b>			<b>611,547</b>	<b>1,141,377</b>
<b>Total liabilities</b>			<b>11,765,083</b>	<b>12,405,179</b>
<b>Net assets</b>			<b>17,161,520</b>	<b>13,059,679</b>
<b>Funds</b>				
Revaluation reserves			13,949,076	9,652,714
Accumulated funds			3,212,444	3,406,965
<b>Total funds</b>			<b>17,161,520</b>	<b>13,059,679</b>

# Statement of Comprehensive Income

For the year ended 31 December 2024

	2024	2023
	\$	\$
<b>Income</b>		
Government subsidies	19,735,029	16,350,216
Revenue from rendering of services	20,242,010	22,146,368
Capital grants	472,497	324,436
Fundraising activities	411,873	302,842
Interest income	1,137	31,576
Sundry income	267,360	56,906
<b>Total income</b>	<b>41,129,906</b>	<b>39,212,344</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Employee expenses	34,330,979	35,319,420
Facilities expenses	4,224,731	5,140,170
Marketing expenses	82,753	89,493
Depreciation and amortisation expenses	824,426	828,630
Interest expenses	298,986	137,768
Other expenses	1,174,662	812,521
Net loss on revaluation of buildings	387,890	-
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>41,324,427</b>	<b>42,328,002</b>
<b>Net deficit for the year</b>	<b>(194,521)</b>	<b>(3,115,658)</b>
<b>Other comprehensive income</b>		
<b>Items that will not be reclassified to profit and loss</b>		
Net gain on revaluation of land	4,296,362	-
<b>Other comprehensive income for the year</b>	<b>4,296,362</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Total comprehensive surplus/(deficit) for the year</b>	<b>4,101,841</b>	<b>(3,115,658)</b>



# Governance & Leadership

## 2024 Board of Directors



**Neil Makepeace BSc(Hons), MSc, GAICD**

Non-Executive Director, Chair



**Daniel Aitchison MHlthMgt, BNursing, GAICD, AFCHSM**

Non-Executive Director



**Christopher Collins LLB, BCom, GDipLP, LLM, MBA**

Non-Executive Director, Chair Finance & Audit Committee



**Josh Mennen LLB, DipFinPlan**

Non-Executive Director, Chair People, Safety and Culture Committee



**Belinda Nankivell BPharm, CertIV TAE, MAICD, MAHRI**

Non-Executive Director



**Sarah-Jane Peterschlingmann BIT, MPropStud, EMBA, GAICD, FACS, ASA**

Non-Executive Director



**Jennie Riley GIA (Affiliated)**

Company Secretary

## Advisory Committee

This committee provides independent, impartial advice to our Board of Directors, Executive Leadership Team, Senior Management and Professional Excellent Panel Team about our organisational strategies and services.



**Damien Cassin**



**Asteria Grace**



**Julie Currie**



**Gilly-Elle McKeown**



**Ashley Duffin**



**Dr Alexis Wallis**

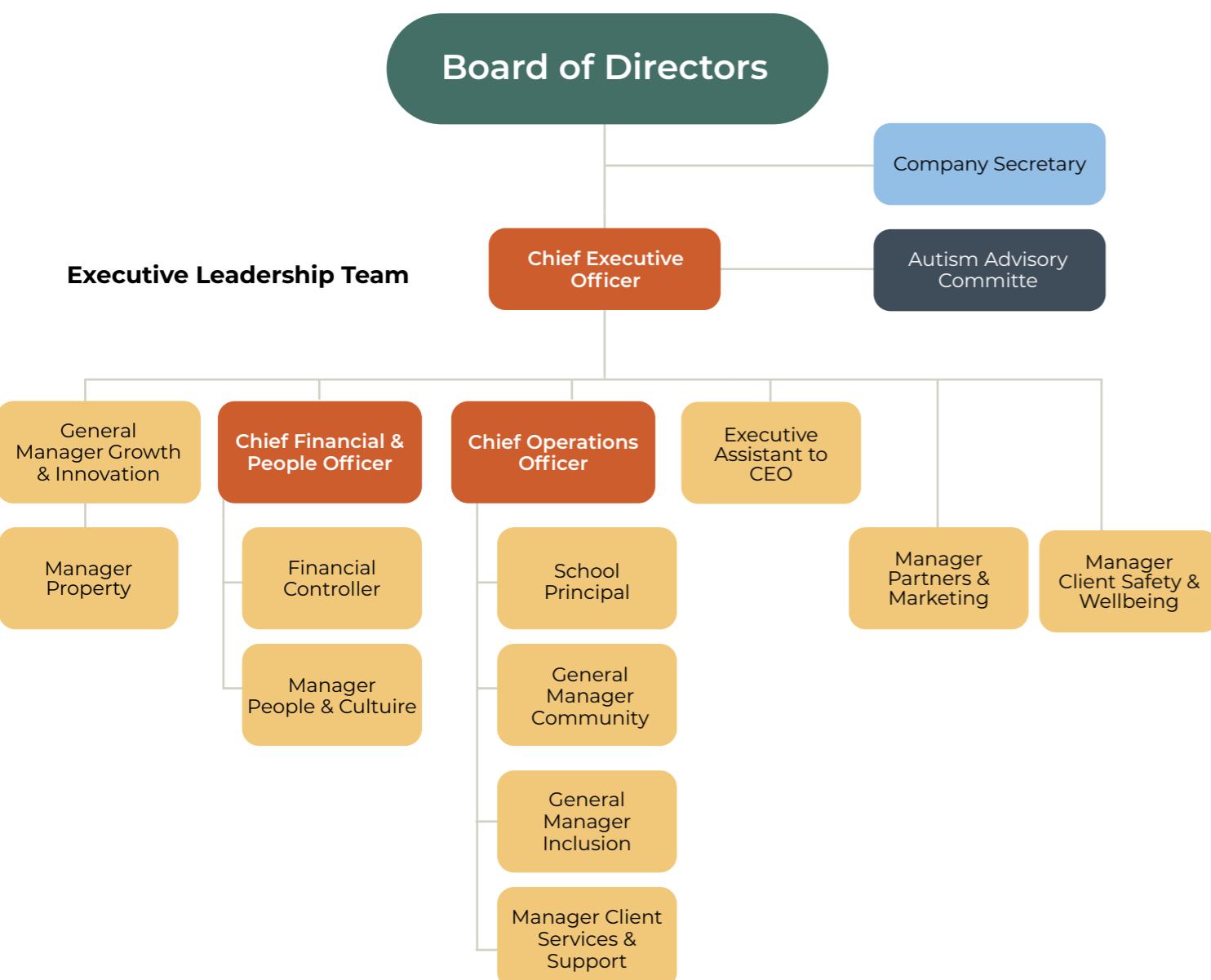


**Emma Hinze**



**Dr Rachelle Wicks (Chair)**

# Our Governance Structure



## Our Patron

Her Excellency the Honourable  
**Dr Jeannette Young AM PSM**  
 Governor of Queensland

## Autism Queensland are members of the following:



**Thank  
you for your  
support**

## Australian Government

- Department of Education
- Department of Social Services

Queensland Government

- Department of Education, Early Childhood Education and Care
- Department of Education, Non-State Special Needs Organisations Program
- Department of Education, Specialist Disability Support in Schools
- Department of Tourism, Innovation and Sport
- Department of Employment, Small Business and Training
- Gambling Community Benefit Fund
- The Queensland Disability Peak and Representative Bodies Program

## Brisbane City Council

- Lord Mayor's Charitable Trust

We would like to acknowledge and thank all funders, volunteers and donors for their generous support in 2024. Your generosity helps transform lives and make our community more inclusive for everyone.

# Partners, Donors and Supporters

ALG Park Lions Club	Lions Club of Bracken Ridge Central
Allianz	Lucky Star Tavern
Anthea Polson Art	S. Lyman
Armada Built	Macquarie Technology
D. Armstrong	Martin Edge
Autism CRC	Master Engraving
Autism Hub & Reading Centre, Department of Education	B. Nankivell
Beenleigh Bowls Club	North Mackay Rotary Club
Big Rocks Hospitality Group	C. McCaul
G & S Begent	OneTeam IT
J. Blakely	Piccones Supa IGA
Brothers Leagues Club (Cairns) Limited & Fullers Sports Club	Play for Purpose Charity Lottery
C. Clayton	S. Pretorius
ConnocoPhillips	P. Purdie
Deloitte Impact Day	C. Rober
Dawn Athletic	J.J. Richards & Sons Pty Ltd
B. Firth	The Cory Charitable Foundation
Flagon and Dragon Mackay	The Edge, State Library of Queensland
Hotel Lowood	N. Turner
S.C. Greensill	Hart Family Perpetual Trust
Friendly Grocer Brighton	Emma Tomlinson
P. Goh	Paypal Giving Fund
Griffith Group	B. Riley
Great Southern Bank	Sunnybank Rotary Club
Gympie Sports Club	Viatris Australia
A. Hardke	Village Roadshow
K. Hooper	A. Wandel
Hoyts	William Angliss Charitable Fund
K. Kakanis	Estate of P.M.E. Weston
	F. Zulkifly



#### Contact details

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T: (07) 3273 0000



#### Visit our website

[autismqld.com.au](http://autismqld.com.au)



#### Brighton

136 North Rd  
Brighton QLD 4017

#### Brightwater

18 Freshwater St  
Mountain Creek QLD 4557

#### Cairns

15-17 Marr St  
Edmonton QLD 4868

11 Cava Close  
Bungalow QLD 4870

#### Gladstone

803 Glenlyon Rd  
Glen Eden QLD 4680

#### Gold Coast

Suite 6, 153 Cotlew St  
Ashmore QLD 4214

#### Mackay

10 Macrossan Street  
Mackay QLD 4740

#### Rockhampton

373 Lakes Creek Rd  
Koongal QLD 4700

#### Sunnybank Hills

437 Hellawell Rd  
Sunnybank Hills  
QLD 4109