





“This camp allowed me to really connect with my child again. Invaluable.”
Belinda Gribble

contents

5	Message from Chair
7	Message from CEO
8	Our Mission and Vision
10	Theory of Change
12	NSW Camp
22	Queensland Camp
28	Victoria recce
32	DSS Funded Parent & Sibling Program
36	Other Funding Partners
40	Auditor's and Treasurer's Report
41	Statement of Comprehensive Income
42	Statement of Financial Position
43	Statement of Cash Flows
46	Team ACA
47	Thank you



“We had an incredible time at Autism Camp and are so grateful to all of the staff and support people involved. It was such a fantastic experience on so many levels. For our daughter in the Autistic kids group, for our son in the siblings group and for us as parents. We also got to spend time together as a family in a relaxed and enjoyable way.”

Anna Weiss

A Message from The Chair

The outstanding success of Autism Camp Australia during the persisting Pandemic is an achievement to be celebrated by the entire Autism Camp community. Every member of the Autism Camp team from Carers, to Providers, to the Operational team, the Executive and Board has overcome challenges that at times appeared insurmountable amongst relentless uncertainty. The year commenced amidst a level of uncertainty that required the whole organisation to find the stamina and resilience to continuously plan and adapt plans, while constantly and astutely managing risk. This stamina and resilience are inspired by an unwavering organisation-wide commitment to the Autistic young people and the families we are in service of.

Autism Camp delivered on a promise to provide our service to Autistic young people and their families especially while they endured such difficult circumstances. The commitment to have Camps up and running for Summer was the focus of the Executive and Board. We were determined to run a Camp in November 2020 that ensured the safety of families and team members and complied with applicable Health Orders. The team lead by CEO Rachel Rowe delivered that Camp with such finesse that it was a resounding success and set the template for Camps to come.

Throughout Summer and Autumn, the Autism Camp team adapted quickly to the constantly changing conditions presented by the Pandemic. The decision was made to make all efforts to adapt and to cancel Camps only when absolutely necessary. This decision was driven by our Autistic young people and their families who were relying on us to deliver an experience for which some had been looking forward to for almost a year.

The team delivered the Summer and Autumn Camps through continuous risk management, requiring a commitment that went beyond expectations even in a Pandemic. It meant our CEO would tirelessly refine and implement COVID safety plans and Camp delivery strategy countless times while keeping constant open communication with our Providers, Carers and Operations teams and most critically with our community of families. Following each Camp, the team considered lessons learned and strategically responded to those lessons refining systems and process thereby building on the strength of each Camp.

Today Autism Camp has a proven track record of delivering successful Camps and evidential outcomes that speak to the achievement of our theory of change and charitable purpose. The organisation has further proven its capability and capacity to not only withstand external impacts but to thrive through collaboration, continuous improvement and astute risk management and not least a very large measure of unparalleled determination from our esteemed CEO Rachel Rowe.

The year ahead will no doubt bring a new set of challenges however I am encouraged that the organisational capability and capacity to successfully navigate any challenge has been fortified by the year behind us. We also have a highly skilled and experienced Board who are strategic and effective in managing governance and risk. As the organisation is set to grow in the years to come, I personally look forward to our next Strategic Planning session where we will look to consolidate the strategic plan and focus on the development and wellbeing of our extraordinary Autism Camp team.



Shelly Rowell
Chair of Board, Autism Camp Australia



“Absolutely amazing experience. The whole ACA team are phenomenal & felt like family.”

Leisa Westermann

A Message from The CEO

Curious, bewildering, confusing and quite overwhelming at times, 2020-2021 was definitely a year to remember.

If there was ever a year to challenge an Autistic sensibility this was it. The constantly shifting goal posts, State border closures and lockdowns required total flexibility and an expanding crisis management toolkit. And yet, despite being overshadowed by the growing global Covid-19 Pandemic, and the constantly changing and shifting operational parameters the Pandemic ensued, Autism Camp Australia has continued to thrive.

And not just thrive, but grow, exponentially.

Taking a step back, while our camps were decommissioned in the Winter of 2020 enabled us to reframe the Pandemic in a positive way. With the support of a growing team of consummate and caring professionals, and the cheers of an enthusiastic Autistic community, our newly formed team rose to the challenges presented by the Pandemic and forged ahead.

Camps reopened in Byron Bay, NSW in November 2020, and a second location opened shortly thereafter in the Sunshine Coast, QLD. A reconnaissance trip to Victoria in March confirmed a third State location to open in late 2021.

Fundamental to this commitment to moving forward and pushing through adversity, were the extraordinary results, feedback and response from the families who had attended our first and only camp pre 2020-2021. And a realisation that our camps were not going to be just a glorified respite service, but a place where significant steps towards mainstream social and community participation could be realised by Autistic young people and their families.

Our authentic strengths-based approach to the health and wellbeing of Autistic young people and their families was having an incredible impact. At camp, we celebrated neurodiversity, embraced difference and nurtured individuality. Our Autistic young people and their families were with their neurokin when at camp, developing confidence and independence, increasing their social connection, making new and lasting friendships and celebrating their Autistic identity. There was no need for social skills training or behaviour management when the shackles of neuro-normative expectations were stripped away. It became clear, that ACA's experiential learning camp program was going to help form the initial engagement for many isolated Autistic young people and work as a stepping-stone to mainstream inclusion.

An ongoing commitment to the creation of a Neurodiversity Manifesto, by a working party of Autism Camp Australia's neurodivergent Board, Executive and camp team members has been a driving force for the organisation, with guiding principles to advance equality and inclusion in all that we do.

None of this would have been possible without the support of our funders, the Ingrained Foundation, the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Department of Social Security, the James Frizelle Charitable Foundation, WDEA Works Foundation, and the astonishing ongoing support of families in the Autistic community who continue to put their trust in us.

To date, 358 families have enrolled at our camps, and many of those have now attended camp several times. As I hoped, many of these repeat family visits are families coming back to camp together, with new friendships formed, and a long future dreamed of together becoming a reality. Connections made are testimony to my incredibly skilled camp teams. Without them, this charity would not exist, and their dedication in adversity has been astonishing.

Finally, my sincere thanks to Shelly Rowell and the ACA Board of Director's, in guiding our vision and strategy. ACA's Board bring a broad knowledge base and experience which has been integral to the success of the charity in this second year.

As we begin our third year of trading, we are now certain that our model brings great benefits to Autistic young people and their families and are excited by all that we can do to support our young people to find their place in their world.



Rachel Rowe
Chief Executive Officer, Autism Camp Australia

Our Mission and Vision

Autism Camp Australia's mission is to improve the health and wellbeing of Autistic young people and their families, through the provision of accessible and supported capacity building experiences, therapies and life skills development.

Our vision is self-reliance, independence, social connection and community inclusion for Autistic young people and their families.

Our Organisational Objectives

- To offer access to a wide range of activities through residential camps, experiential learning and recreation activities;
- To provide a high level of support for all participants;
- To ensure our activities and facilities are person-centred, family-focused and customer-driven;
- To maintain ethical and egalitarian business practices for all individuals associated with the Autism Camp Australia endeavour;
- To establish partnerships with individuals and organisations who are similarly like-minded; and
- To contribute to the evolution of a balanced and respectful relationship between Autistic young people, their families and neurotypical Australians.

The program contributes to significant change in the lives of Autistic young people by supporting them to:

- build self-confidence and communication skills;
- develop social skills, create positive connections and increase social interactions with peers, carers and other families;
- actively participate in every-day and self-care tasks by nurturing, supporting and encouraging independence;
- engage in new activities and to explore, experience and learn from new experiences;
- explore sensory and emotional regulation using proprioceptive and sensory supports, games and other positive behaviour support tools; and
- make and sustain friendships with their peers.





“Autism Camp Australia will change your child’s life. An incredible team of carers swoop in, wrap their arms around you & your child & support you to have a brilliant week. You will get the chance to rest & press the reset button ready to take on the world again.”

Travis Saunders

Theory of change

Inclusion for Autistic Young People

Autism Camp Australia was developed to bridge a gap. We recognised a critical missing link which was needed to enable Autistic young people to really build capacity. That missing link is Autistic community.

ACA's experiential learning camp program forms the initial engagement for many isolated Autistic young people. The Autism friendly environment and coming together of Autistic community builds confidence and works as a stepping-stone to mainstream inclusive social and community participation.

High Social Exclusion Rates for Autistic Young People

Social exclusion, loneliness and a lack of friends are a major factor in the life of Autistic young people. From the very first recorded cases of Autism, scientists have recognized that a lack of social interaction is a central part of the condition. In his 1943 paper, Leo Kanner interpreted the behaviour of Autistic children as being governed by 'the powerful desire for aloneness and sameness.' For decades after, scientists and clinicians supposed that Autistic people do not have friends and are not interested in forging friendships. A new line of research is forcing a rethink of those long-held beliefs. Autistic people overwhelmingly report that they want friends. And they have shown that they can and do form friendships with both allistic and Autistic peers, even if their interactions sometimes look different from those among allistic people.

A study of Autistic youth made in 2011 found that 55.4% had never gotten together with a friend and 63.9% had never been called on the phone by a friend in the 12 months prior to the survey (Liptak et al. 2011). Not surprisingly, conversational impairment and differences in social communication were associated with an even lower likelihood of social participation. Autistic young people also fair significantly worse than young people with other disabilities. Solish et al. (2011) found that half of their sample of Autistic children and adolescents had no friends, compared with less than one-quarter of adolescents with an intellectual disability. Although the association is not clear, Gilmore & Cuskelly (2014) suggested that the ramifications of loneliness and social exclusion could potentially contribute to the known mental and physical health inequalities that further exacerbate social exclusion.

Meaningful One-on-One Engagement

It's important to note that social inclusion can be described as not only being present in a community, but also having meaningful social connections and participating in fulfilling social activities (Cummins & Lau 2003; Hall 2005; Overmars-Marx et al. 2013). It is not enough to simply turn up at a social and community activity. One must also have the confidence and skills to participate. Shattuck et al. (2011) agreed that the majority of Autistic adolescents experience major obstacles to social participation, and went on to note that experiences with peers are more likely to occur one-on-one. The social overwhelm of group-based activities combined with anxieties around trying new things can be a major roadblock.

A Pathway to Social Inclusion

Friendship and interpersonal relationships are a normal and expected necessity of life; friendship provides companionship, assistance, emotional support and fosters self-esteem and well-being (Hartup & Stevens 1999). Opportunities for synchrony will emerge more readily between two Autistic young people than between an Autistic person and an allistic person. If we build Autistic community and a safe Autism friendly environment where Autistic identity is celebrated, we create opportunities for growth. Connection, communication and similarities with Autistic peers can help build confidence.



Structured Teaching

Structured teaching refers to a group of strategies that are used to create an environment where Autistic young people can operate with increasing independence (Bennett, Reichow, & Wolery, 2011; Hume, Loftin, & Lantz, 2009). The framework is suitable to use with individuals of various ages and capabilities (Mesibov & Shea, 2011). Mesibov, Howley & Naftel (2016) and Hume (2015) have highlighted four key elements of structured teaching: a) physical structural arrangements of the environment b) visual schedules c) systems d) visual structure. The refined package may be viewed as an eclectic approach (Kasari & Smith, 2013) which realistically aims to support Autistic young people to become confident in mainstream inclusive social and community participation.

A Strengths and Interests Based Model

A series of case studies by Lanou et al (2011) presents strategies which capitalise on the students' authentic interests and strengths as a way of meeting their school-based challenges. Through these passions, the authors were able to tap into students' own motivation and true abilities, laying the foundation for success. The baseline results of 52 parents of Autistic youth participating in a 3-year longitudinal survey study were explored, with results showing that according to parents the program positively impacted participants' sense of belonging, confidence and self-esteem, health and well-being, social relationships and interactions, and activities and participation. Strengths-based programs, focusing on developing skills in a supportive environment, will enable Autistic young people to more effectively prepare for mainstream inclusive social and community participation.

Engaging The Power Of Interests

A study by Koenig et al. (2017) showed that participants have a positive view of preferred interests, view preferred interests as a way to mitigate anxiety, and engage in vocational and avocational pursuits around their preferred interests. Findings support a strength-based view of preferred interests with the majority of participants articulating that their areas of interest were positive, beneficial, and should be encouraged.

Inclusion for Autistic Young People

Autism Camp Australia was developed to bridge a gap. We recognised a critical missing link which was needed to enable Autistic young people to really build capacity. That missing link is Autistic community. ACA's experiential learning camp program forms the initial engagement for many isolated Autistic young people. The Autism friendly environment and coming together of Autistic community builds confidence and works as a stepping-stone to mainstream inclusive social and community participation by

- Supporting the Autistic young person to develop new one-to-one friendships with their Autistic peers, to develop confidence and resilience, increase their social connection, develop new and lasting friendships and celebrate their Autistic identity;
- Using a one-to-one carer/Autistic young person care-based model, building confidence and self-belief in the participant within a 'safe' ACA camp environment lead by a mix of Autistic and allistic young adults;
- Building on existing strengths and special interests in a supportive environment, enabling Autistic young people to more effectively prepare for mainstream inclusive activities;
- Working with a strengths-based programme focused on improving emotional regulation, independence and social and community participation;
- Introducing an experiential 'taster plate' of new activities to the young person during the camp to enable them to 'taste test' new activities and expand on interests which they may wish to pursue but haven't had the social confidence to do so until now; and
- Collecting data which supports the development and provision of appropriate mainstream inclusive activities for Autistic young people.

New South Wales Camp

A 6-month long Covid driven hiatus from March 2020 until September 2020 finally came to an end, and with much excitement and a little uncertainty we reopened the doors to our first camp location in Lake Ainsworth on the North Coast of New South Wales in November 2020.

Despite having launched the charity a mere 3 months before Covid's first wave, and only run one actual camp pre-first wave, an astonishing 80 out of 84 of the families who had booked to attend our camps throughout that period and tolerated multiple postponements as we pushed camp opening dates back from July to September and finally November 2020, stuck it out through the inaugural Covid lockdown period and filled the family spots at our Spring/Summer camps. Such was both the need, and the belief in the program that we had created.

Over two thirds of our original camp team also came back - providers, suppliers, carers, volunteers were rested and ready. The rapport that we had built at the first camp, led by our awesome NSW Camp Leader Helene Thompson was still very much alive and well. Professional development opportunities had been provided to the team during the lockdown period and new carers recruited to fill any gaps. When we say we hand pick our people - we mean it! So new carers went through a rigorous screening and interview process, were given comprehensive training on ACA's culture, policies and procedures and provided with ongoing support and access to workshops and educational materials from the brightest sparks in the Autistic community. By the time we were done, the team was pumped and raring to go!

The long locked down winter of discontent had afforded us the opportunity to build on our enrolment process. A detailed multi-stage of gathering medical and behavioural information specific to the Autistic young people attending camp, including detailed questionnaires and parent interviews, was proving to be a strong point of difference for our program, enabling carers to deep dive into that child's individual needs, triggers, calmers, likes, dislikes and tailor their care and support response to the individual.

“Autism Camp Australia was an overwhelmingly positive experience for our family. Our children made fabulous new friends in an environment where they were accepted and supported. The carers are ideal role models with generous amounts of fun thrown in. To see our kids happy for days on end, willing to try everything and treating their new friends with kindness and respect is such a privilege. We feel so refreshed and ready to face our next challenge. Thanks ACA.”

Nicole Sheill



“We absolutely loved Autism Camp! Our two Autistic boys had an amazing time and we were able to get some much needed down time. The staff were fantastic, and we felt our kids were always their top priority. The carers were perfectly matched to our children and made the world of difference to both us and the kids having a great time. We are already making plans to go back again.”

Desma Hsu

“No words can describe the positive experience my two boys had at Camp Byron Bay. My seven year old came back after every day saying that he felt “happy”, and he’s never been able to describe his feelings to me before. The carers were next level amazing, so approachable and knowledgeable about the kids and built a great rapport with them. There were tears when we left. We can’t wait to come back again soon.”

Rachel Pulo



New South Wales Camp



A new State based Enrolments Manager role was formalised enabling personalised support and liaison for each and every family. Two weeks before camp the Enrolment Manager matched each child with the best fit carer based on temperament, personality, experience and interests. A detailed information pack on each child including an Individual Camp Plan (ICP) based on the child's NDIS goals, and an Individual Client Risk Profile and Management Plan (ICRPMP) which detailed the specific requirements needed to support that individual child was provided to the child's 'match' carer. That match carer then required to present their child to the whole team at a pre-camp case management meeting a week before camp.

This thorough preparation has become an essential element in the success of each camp. It's not an exaggeration to say that the carers wait with bated breath for their 'matches' for each camp and devour the information on the day we send it out.

A new State Manager was our next newly created role to undertake all elements of a growing human resources and location management workload. Checking Working With Children Checks, National Police clearances, First Aid certification, insurances for each and every contractor involved in the camp. A growing team of carers, suppliers, providers, therapists, workshop facilitators, transport and catering partners all needed to meet every check and balance for us to ensure a safe environment for our families. Then run sheets, inclement weather plans, programs, and the all-important ever-changing Covid Safety Plan.

With State border lockdowns still an issue, all our families at the November camp came from within NSW, with families attending from Sydney, Newcastle, Armidale and Deniliquin and the North Coast. By December, families from Victoria and Queensland were also able to come and take part. In January not one but three of the nine families we hosted were returning families, proof that even in a Pandemic, and after just a handful of camps, our dream of multiple families returning year after year was absolutely possible.

We'd learnt from our first camp that an authentic strengths-based approach to the health and wellbeing of Autistic young people and their families was critical to our success. As we moved forward in NSW we focused even more on creating a 'safe' ACA camp environment where Autistic young people (and their often Autistic family members) could meet and be with their neurokin, take off their masks and be freed from the often confusing day-to-day standards and systems of neurotypical life.

In this space, we had seen Autistic young people grow in confidence, build their self-esteem and satisfaction in themselves, try new things, or not try new things, but because of a non-directive demand-free approach they actually were less anxious and more open to trying new things. And as a direct result of being less anxious they were also more likely to make new friends. Friends who understood the way their head worked.

We had also seen our parents/carers and siblings build increased resilience, enhance their social networks and in doing so, have a greater ability to maintain informal supports for their young people.

We recognised neurodiversity as a way of thinking that supported our children to grow into confident and happy adults, and we supported our amazing Autistic young people to build confidence and self-belief. The results of this approach were astonishing.

By the end of the summer the cohesiveness and connection between camp team members was extraordinary. This was big, exhausting work, but it was incredibly rewarding. Soul food. We were attracting a particular type of disability support worker or early learning professional, the team could not get enough of the work we were doing, and this passion became another essential element in the success of each camp.

Remarkably, despite a few dodged lockdown bullets we managed to run sold out camps consistently at our NSW location through April, May, June and July. Even supporting two Sydney families thrown into a retrospective lockdown while at the July camp, showed how possible it was for us to adapt to survive in challenging circumstances. Our first State location was up and running and going strong. It was time to expand.



New South Wales Camp







“Finally a safe and inclusive space for not only our son but for us as a family. The support from the other parents and the support from the carers is AMAZING. Our time at camp has given us so much as a family and we cannot thank the team at Autism Camp Australia enough, and especially our camp carer who is a super special human.”

Callie Grayson





Queensland Camp

So, to a second State and location.

A search for a new accommodation partner had begun before Covid's first wave, but further exploration and recruitment of team members had been hampered by lockdowns. A short 4 hour drive from our HQ in the Byron Bay hinterland, the Sunshine Coast in Queensland was an obvious choice for our second location. A first reconnaissance trip had taken CEO Rachel to a selection of locations and potential accommodation partners from Pomona in the North to Beerwah in the South. But it was the newly refurbished Queensland Recreation, Sports and Arts facilities in Currumundi which stood out.

Offering the best of the Sunshine Coast without the crowds, this new Autism Camp Queensland location was a stone's throw from Caloundra in the coastal village of Currumundi. With the naturally stylish Noosa, and the awe-inspiring Glass House Mountains only a short drive away, glorious sunny days and warm water most of the year, it was an ideal place for our second State location. Less than 90 minutes' drive from Brisbane City and the Brisbane Domestic and International Airports and 20 minutes' drive from the Sunshine Coast Airport, our new camp location between Currimundi Beach and the mouth of Currimundi Lake was a perfect sister site for our New South Wales camp and it ticked all the boxes for what we needed.

A natural lake connected to a long and unspoilt stretch of beautiful surf beach, the Currimundi lake and beachfront had extensive parks and walkways to enjoy before or after a swim in the surf or the calm waters of the lake. The lake was perfect for canoeing and paddle boarding. And a new autonomous sub-section of the Sports and Recreation site, 'Shellys', was being rebuilt from the ground up and would be ready for us to launch in December. A suggestion from our CEO, to add a self-catering kitchen to the site development plans was embraced by our accommodation partner, and we signed on the dotted line. Now to find our new team.

“Autism Camp Australia provides a great family experience. Education and self-care for the parents, understanding, empathy and adventure for the siblings as well as for the Autistic kids. A great program focusing on adventure and kicking goals in life!”

Bethany Dutton



With the experience of building the NSW team behind us, and a newly established protocol and manual for how a State should run, a State Manager, Enrolments Manager and Camp Leader were recruited, and from there a whole new team of carers, suppliers, providers, therapists, workshop facilitators, transport and catering partners. Once again, a stringent set of guidelines and requirements, and only the most specialised carers, with real understanding and experience of working with neurodivergent young people. We were especially keen to build the number of neurodivergent role models in our team, honouring their lived experience of Autism and ADHD. Our newly formed camp management and carer team reflected this commitment.

Our first camp launched in December with a similar program to our sister site, creating continuity and familiarity for our visiting families. Our new Queensland location came with its own local flavour, and specialities. A ten-metre high indoor rock wall and ropes courses became instant firm favourites. A team full to the brim with quirks and idiosyncrasies, warmth and experience, gave our families the reassurance they needed to step right in and the results were astonishing. Once again, the calibre of our team meant the experiences of our families was second to none.

A snap 3-day lockdown meant one of our January camps was postponed, and our June camp encompassed a second snap lockdown which we took in our stride. There are worse places to be locked down than Autism Camp Australia – with disability support workers continued essential services and a long stretch of golden beach for parents to exercise on!

Our second States camps sold out as quickly as the NSW site, despite the challenges of the Pandemic, and we settled into a new rhythm at our new location.

It was time to push on to our third State.





“What an amazing bunch you all are! We had the most wonderful time! To think that it was near impossible to get my son to this camp in the first place because of his anxieties about change and new places, and now he is devastated the camp has come to an end and is already talking about when we can go on the next one! This is the incredible impact these kind, patient and encouraging carers have on the children. Not to mention the sibling program for our daughter was just what she needed! She had an absolute blast.”

Sarah Butcher





Victoria Camp recce

The autumn months were the rose between two Covid-lockdown thorns, and we jumped at a chance to embark on a new State reconnaissance in Victoria. Traversing much of the south of the State in just 3 days, we took in potential accommodation partners from Warragul in the east to Anglesea in the west, eventually settling on the magical Camp Wyuna, a stunning property on the arm of the Bellarine Peninsula, with the tranquil waters of Swan Bay on one side of the property, and a wide, open beach and views out into the Bass Strait on the other.

The awesome Bellarine Railway ran right past the camp gate, and the Marine Discovery Centre was a 2-minute walk from the site.

Located near the elegant historic seaside village of Queenscliff our new location of choice was less than half an hour from Geelong and an easy ferry ride across the bay to the Mornington Peninsula. It was ideally situated as a launch pad for an extended vacation in this picturesque part of the Victorian countryside. Just 1hr 30 minutes from Melbourne City Centre, 50 mins from Avalon Airport families were set up to explore the wider Geelong and Bellarine region, the Great Ocean Road, Mornington Peninsula and Philip Island.

The site was ticking a lot of boxes.

We cancelled our last day of potential site visits further inland.

Without hesitation we signed on the dotted line, and Camp VIC was born!

Then Covid's second wave hit in Victoria.

With a launch set for September we pushed on. Aply led by new State Manager Sandy Palmer we started the gathering of a whole new local crew, and in March launched our new location to our families, selling out in just two weeks. This was going to be big.









“We cannot (as parents) express our gratitude enough. The camp was wonderful for all of us. The kids were engaged with the activities, got to explore things they had not done before, have the ability to get space when needed and come back ‘happy tired’ by the end of the day. We liked how we could come together (or not) as a family at lunch time. It was truly a safe space for us all. The carers were seriously amazing - how do you find so many great humans in one place?! We made family connections (through our shared reality) that I know we will cherish forever!!”

Georgina Ablett

DSS Funded Parent and Sibling Program

Parent and Sibling Program

In October 2020 we were awarded 2-year funding through the Department of Social Security Information, Linkages and Capacity Building: Individual Capacity Building Program.

The objective of the Individual Capacity Building Program is to enable systematic, nationwide access to peer support, mentoring and other skills building for people with disability, carers and families, delivered primarily by a national network of Disabled Peoples Organisations, Families Organisations and/or Priority Cohort Led Organisations.

The funding enabled us to expand on the Autistic young persons' program at our camps, by providing a specialised program of social peer support, education, skills building and self-care for parents/carers and siblings of Autistic young people. Over a period of 24 months, it was forecast that over 700 Autistic young people and their families in two States would benefit from this expanded program.



Parental Stress and Social Support

When Schieve, et al.(2007) studied the 2003 National Survey of Children's Health they concluded that parents of Autistic children have higher levels of stress than either parents of children with other special needs or developmentally normal children. Gouin et al (2016) studied the impact of social support on the health of parents of Autistic children in the context of chronic caregiving stress. Results indicated that greater social support improved health. After the study Gouin concluded "Supporting the parents in coping with chronic caregiving stress might not only improve the child's outcome, but also may help maintain an optimal family environment for a longer period of time. Supporting the parents in providing care to their Autistic children might then represent a cost-effective strategy in the long-term."

In survey results from a sample group of families who had enrolled in our programs:

- 95% of parents/carers said they experience stress and anxiety as a result of their role as a parent/ caregiver of an Autistic young person;
- Only 43% of parents/carers received formal social support from health or medical or social services professionals in their role as a parent/caregiver to an Autistic young person;
- 78% of parents/carers said they did not feel supported in coping with caregiving stress in their role as a parent/caregiver to an Autistic young person;
- 82% of parents/carers said they believe their physical health would benefit a lot from engaging in self-care activities;
- 86% of parents/carers said they believe their mental health would benefit a lot from engaging in self-care activities; and
- 82% of parents/carers said they believe their Autistic young person would benefit a lot from an improvement in the parent/carers physical or mental health and wellbeing.

Highly stressed parents are less able to implement interventions for their children, and their children make less developmental progress. (Osborne et al, 2008). Parental stress plays a significant role in the development of Autistic children (Davis, 2008). Parents of Autistic children report that their own emotional states impact their children's emotions and behaviour. (Zhou, 2014). Parents of Autistic children tend to be more directive and less sensitive in their interactions, due to the parents' greater stress and/or feeling less effective as parents (Patterson et al, 2014)

The parent/carer program funded through this grant has two components to support parent/ carer wellbeing. Education focuses on reoccurring areas of stress in Autistic families, e.g. navigating a relationship with the child's school, the impact of caregiver stress on the parental relationship, Autism and adolescence. Self-care introduced evidence-based self-care techniques e.g. meditation/yoga, which actively promote wellbeing and optimum health.

Sibling Stress and Social Support

Rossiter and Sharpe (2001) observed that the presence of a sibling with a disability may be associated with increased risk for internalising behaviour, such as depression and anxiety. Hastings (2003b) observed that the ability for a child to successfully adjust may be moderated by his/her access to social support.

In survey results from a sample group of families who had enrolled in our programs:

- 100% of siblings said they experience stress and anxiety as a result of their role as a sibling of an Autistic young person;
- 84% of siblings said increased social support would help them build confidence, voice concerns, access information and/or resolve issues with their Autistic sibling;
- 83% of siblings said they do not feel supported in their role as a sibling to an Autistic young person;
- 100% of siblings said they never get to take part in a program specifically for siblings of Autistic young people.

Being the sibling of an Autistic young person can be both a challenging and enriching experience. Siblings have the longest relationship of any with the person with disability, including parents and special educators. Most siblings handle this effectively, and many of them respond with love, grace and humour far beyond their years. However, siblings can often be overlooked, which can lead to feelings of isolation. The emotional demands can see many siblings 'at risk' of developing emotional and behavioural problems. In our siblings' survey 83% said they do not feel supported in their role as a sibling to an Autistic young person. If siblings are acknowledged and connected to sources of support, they are likely to become more resilient. If we can nurture that relationship from early on then it is likely that the sibling relationship will be enduring and mutually sustaining. In the longer term, a sibling will play a very important role in the social and emotional wellbeing of the person with disability.

The sibling program funded through this grant allows siblings to come together, share experiences and learn ways of dealing positively with the challenges they face as the sibling of an Autistic young person. A core part of our Sibling program is an abridged version of the SibworkS peer support program (ICB funded 2019/20) which aims to reduce social isolation, enhance social networks, improve relationships between family members and increase resilience. Just as parents improve capacity and resilience through having contact with other parents, so siblings share experiences and coping skills.



The Benefits of Parent and Sibling Programs at Camp

At the end of our first reporting period on April 30, 2021, after taking part in our Parent program:

- 88% of parents said they had improved capacity and resilience in emotional and behavioural functioning;
- 88% of parents said they had achieved improved social and practical skills to enable them to function better day-to-day;
- 86% of parents said they had achieved a boost to confidence, self-esteem, mental and physical health and increased resilience;
- 96% of parents said they had achieved the rest and recovery and temporary relief from caregiving leading to a greater ability to maintain informal supports for their Autistic young person(s); and
- 92% of parents said they had reduced their social isolation and enhanced their social networks.

At the end of our first reporting period on April 30, 2021, after taking part in our Sibling program:

- 95% of siblings said they had improved emotional and behavioural functioning;
- 82% of siblings said the program helped them understand their siblings' disability;
- 91% of siblings said they had achieved increased resilience;
- 95% of siblings said they had experienced a relief from the burden of responsibility leading to a greater ability to maintain informal supports for their Autistic siblings(s); and
- 91% of siblings said they had reduced their social isolation and enhanced their social networks.

The Department of Social Security funded Parent and Sibling programs will continue into 2022.

Funding partners



Create NSW, the NSW Government's arts and cultural driver, granted us a \$4943 Creative Kids Digital Small Business Grant to buy video recording equipment and transition our camp based Zoom Art Therapy program for online and digital delivery during COVID-19 and moving into the future. The course went live in October 2020, and was facilitated by Autism Camp Byron Bay's resident art therapist Karma Barnes. Karma invited young people on a fun creative journey of exploring artmaking to express their impressions of the world through art; igniting the imagination and bringing form to creative voices through pastels, collage, watercolours, clay and acrylic over a 5 week course.



The James Frizelle Charitable Foundation was established to support those who have contributed to our great country but may have unfortunately through no fault of their own, fallen on hard times and can no longer speak for themselves. ACA's Helping Hands Program is a funded sponsor program for financially disadvantaged families of Autistic young people. The program enables families who would otherwise be unable, to participate in our camps. The James Frizelle Charitable Foundation granted us \$30,000, to enable us to pilot our Helping Hand program in the Northern Rivers, NSW region.





The WDEA Works Foundation provides assistance to community organisations to assist those living with a disability or disadvantage. The Foundation aims to reduce barriers for people living with a disability or disadvantage to participate in community life, promotes inclusiveness, through group activities specifically targeted towards disability or disadvantage and enables people living with a disability or disadvantage to develop skills and grow within their community. The WDEA Works Foundation granted us \$5000 towards equipping our Rock & Roll Pro-Sense Space at the new Victoria camp. The Rock & Roll Pro-Sense Space a portable sensory-equipped space that is used to encourage Autistic young people, and teach parents to support Autistic young people, how to modulate sensory information using sensory and proprioceptive tools.



The Department of Social Services Information, Linkages and Capacity Building: Individual Capacity Building Program enables systematic, nationwide access to peer support, mentoring and other skills building for people with disability, carers and families, delivered primarily by a national network of Disabled Peoples Organisations, Families Organisations and/or Priority Cohort Led Organisations. The Department granted us \$280,440 over 24 months, to enable us to expand on the Autistic young persons' program at our camps, by providing a specialised program of social peer support, education, skills building and self-care for parents/carers and siblings of Autistic young people.



Australian Government
Department of Social Services





Auditors Report

We have audited the financial report, being a special purpose financial report, of Autism Camp Australia Ltd for the year ended 30 June 2021, comprising the statement of financial position, statement of changes in equity, statement of profit or loss and statement of cash flows for the year then ended, notes comprising a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information, and the directors' declaration.

In our opinion, the financial report of Autism Camp Australia Ltd has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of Division 60 of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012, including:

- giving a true and fair view of the registered entity's financial position as at 30 June 2021 and of its performance for the year ended on that date; and
- complying with Australian Accounting Standards defined in note 1 to the financial statements, and Division 60 of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Regulation 2013.

Basis for Opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with Australian Auditing Standards. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the Auditor's Responsibilities for the Audit of the Financial Report section of our report. We are independent of the entity in accordance with the independence requirements of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012 and the ethical requirements of the Accounting Professional and Ethical Standards Board's APES 110 Code of Ethics for Professional Accountants (the Code) that are relevant to our audit of the financial report in Australia. We have also fulfilled our other responsibilities in accordance with the Code.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

NFPAS

Adelaide, 10 September, 2021

Treasurers Report

The Profit & Loss Statement for the financial year ending 30 June 2021 shows that Autism Camp Australia (ACA) received total income of \$1,250,676, incurred expenses of \$891,319 and generated a net surplus of \$359,357.

The Statement of Financial Position shows cash on hand at 30 June 2021 of \$461,880, deferred income of \$184,063.

ACA generally receives payments in advance from camp attendees and is also required to pay some camp related expenses in advance. The balance of deferred income at 30 June 2021 i.e. camp fees received prior to 30 June 2021 relating to camps due to be held after 30 June 2021, was \$184,063. I also note that part of this deferral (\$30,000) related to grant income whereby the grant was received prior to 30 June, though fulfillment of the grant requirements was not completed until 30 June 2021. Equally, the balance of prepaid expenses i.e. expenses paid prior to 30 June 2021 though provided after 30 June 2021, was \$55,824.

ACA has significantly increased the scale of operations from the previous year, notwithstanding the challenges presented by COVID-19 restrictions, and enters the new financial year in a strong financial position.

Income

Total revenue of \$1,250,676 comprised \$1,050,940 in camp fees, \$165,163 in grant income, \$18,073 in donations, \$13,500 in COVID-19 related government assistance and other income of \$3,000.

Expenditure

Direct camp related expenses for the year were \$609,262, salary and wages expenses were \$157,690, other overhead expenses were \$117,582 and depreciation expense was \$6,785. ACA incurred very minimal fixed asset purchases during the year.

Budgets and Projections

ACA has prepared and maintains a detailed budget which is provided to all board members. This budget was further refined and updated during the 2021 year, and predicts an increase in turnover during the year ended 30 June 2022 and strong cashflow throughout the year. A modest surplus should buffer risk from external Covid related factors in 2022.



ANDREW WEBB
Treasurer, Autism Camp Australia

Statement of Comprehensive Income

	2021	2020
	\$	\$
INCOME		
Camp Income	1,050,940	83,076
Grant Income	165,163	-
Donations	18,073	10,160
COVID Government Assistance	13,500	39,000
Other Income	3,000	91
TOTAL INCOME	1,250,676	132,327
EXPENDITURE		
Direct Camp Costs	609,262	46,243
Other Expenses	117,582	49,838
Salaries & Wages	157,690	51,594
Depreciation	6,785	2,391
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	891,319	150,066
NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT) FOR THE YEAR	359,357	(17,738)
Other Comprehensive Income	-	-
TOTAL COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR	359,357	(17,738)



Statement of Financial Position

	NOTE	2021	2020
		\$	\$
CURRENT ASSETS			
Cash & Cash Equivalents	3	461,880	180,204
Trade & Other Receivables	4	33,201	9,350
Inventory		5,936	-
Prepaid Expenses		55,824	13,124
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS		556,841	202,678
NON-CURRENT ASSETS			
Property, Plant & Equipment	5	21,671	19,654
TOTAL ASSETS		578,512	222,332
CURRENT LIABILITIES			
Trade & Other Payables	6	42,347	1,938
Annual Leave Provision		10,483	3,583
Deferred Income	7	184,063	234,549
TOTAL CURRENT LIABILITIES		236,893	240,070
TOTAL LIABILITIES		236,893	240,070
NET ASSETS/(LIABILITIES)		341,619	(17,738)
EQUITY		341,619	(17,738)

Statement of Cash Flows

	NOTE	2021	2020
		\$	\$
CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES			
Receipts from Customers & Donors		961,327.3	24,876
Receipts from Grants		195,163	-
Receipts from Government Assistance		19,850	26,000
Payments to Suppliers & Employees		(885,861)	(148,627)
NET CASH FLOWS FROM OPERATING ACTIVITIES	9	290,479	202,249
CASH FLOWS FROM FINANCING ACTIVITIES			
Acquisition of Property, Plant & Equipment		(8,803)	(22,045)
NET CASH FLOWS FROM FINANCING ACTIVITIES		(8,803)	(22,045)
NET (DECREASE)/INCREASE IN CASH & CASH EQUIVALENTS		281,676	180,204
CASH & CASH EQUIVALENTS AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR		180,204	-
CASH & CASH EQUIVALENTS AT THE END OF THE YEAR	3	461,880	180,204







Team ACA

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chairperson

Shelly Rowell

Vice Chairperson

Travis Saunders

Treasurer

Peter Maclean

Treasurer

Andrew Webb

Secretary

Ursula Stevens

Founder

Rachel Rowe

Cherie Kelly

Christina Keeble

HQ & ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

CEO

Rachel Rowe

Fundraising Managers

Gavan Evans

Karri Shaw

Social Media Manager

Helene Thompson

Administrative Assistant

Nicole Manning

Bookkeeper

Naomi Rose

Accountant

Jenny Haines

HR Consultant

Georgina Ablett

Graphic Designer

Kymba Burrows

CRM Design & Consultant

Mischa Colley

CAMP TEAMS

State Managers

Nerrida Haydon

Courtney Calvert

Kerron Bromfield

Enrolments Managers

Bonnie Heitzinger

Klio Norris

Christina Trypis

Camp Leaders

Helene Thompson

Nerrida Haydon

Christina Trypis

James Trickey

Lead Carers

Bonnie Heitzinger

Kimberly Sowers

Rebecca Stanley

Ed Gainer

Laura Dodds

Sibling Leads

Sundara Paunovic

Laura Dodds

Carers

Luke Linardos

Eli Johnson

Deb Ireland

David Weale

Delfina Sere

Tamika McIndoe

Anneke De Graaf

Lisa Rochester

Ramiro Nasta

Amanda McGrath

Eliza Batkin

Jake Donohue

Amy Hill

Ruth Brunner

Grace Byth

Kiah Oosterbeek

Carola De Ona

Chantelle Burl

Diana Davis

Nichole Connely

Bridget O'Callaghan

Samson Fox

Corina Wagner

Katherine Howard

Sarah Tucker

Gaston Fourcade

Lachlan Barratt

Nicola Hall

Tamara Pope

Volunteers

Eline Bakker

Carola De Ona

Sarah Tucker

Tamara Pope

Karen Gray

Thank You

Thank you to all the wonderful people who have contributed to Autism Camp Australia's success this year.

On behalf of the whole team, I would like to thank the Autistic young people, and their families, who have continued to put their faith in us and seek out our services during this difficult Covid times. We are truly humbled to share these experiences with you.

It has been deeply satisfying in our second year to continue to be acknowledged and supported by our Federal Government, partners, philanthropists and corporates, and we sincerely thank them for their generosity and ongoing support.

The Department of Social Security
The Department of Premier and Cabinet
James Frizelle Charitable Foundation
WDEA Works Foundation
Keeley's Cause
Safe on Social

We also acknowledge the generosity of individual donors.

Gurjeet Churma
Phillip Nelson
Leonie Wright
Anthony Sakr
David Costigan
Eoin Hurley
Angela Bending
Peadar Collins
David Martin
Chris Ablett
Nicole Shiel
Elizabeth Eliis
Catherine Leedon
Irina Razvag
Judith Burns
Allison Miller
Julian Foley
Hazel Griffiths
Joseph Sammut
Noelene Sookee
Bel Yong
Sally Brandon

I especially want to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of the ACA camp teams, whose energy and enthusiasm for the work they do is integral to the service we offer. Their knowledge, skill, joy, patience and enthusiasm for what they do is second to none.

Finally, my sincere thanks to Shelly Rowell and the ACA Board of Director's, in guiding our vision and strategy. ACA's Board bring a broad knowledge base and experience which has been integral to the success of the charity in this first year.

ACA was launched to fill a critical gap in services to Autistic young people and their families. At camp, we celebrate neurodiversity, embrace difference and nurture individuality. We want our young people to develop confidence and independence, increase their social connection and develop new and lasting friendships. We recognise neurodiversity as a way of thinking that supports our young people to grow into confident and happy adults and celebrate our Autistic community.

Something you all clearly appreciate.

Thank you.





MAKE A DIFFERENCE

There are several ways you can get involved with Autism Camp Australia

- **Give a donation**
- **Sign up for workplace giving**
- **Leave a gift in your Will**
- **Major Gifts and Philanthropy**

Your donation gives Autism Camp Australia financial stability, enabling us to focus on developing experiential camp programs in new locations, extending our reach across Australia.

You can help us create authentic inclusive camp experiences for families of Autistic young people all around Australia.

Autism Camp Australia Ltd is registered as a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) so all donations are considered tax-deductible.

If you would like to make a donation to Autism Camp Australia please contact Rachel on 02 6684 9304.

AutismCampAustralia.org

+61 2 6684 9304

PO Box 31

Federal NSW 2480

Australia

