

Annual Impact Report
2023

Every aspect of our impact

Welcome to our next chapter...



Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) is a child safe organisation committed to protecting the rights and interests of children and vulnerable people by providing them with a safe environment. This commitment extends to ensuring a culturally safe and inclusive environment that recognises and respects individuals’ heritage, relationships and cultural practices.

Aspect is a company limited by guarantee, duly registered under the Corporations Act 2001.

Aspect is a public benevolent institution with deductible gift recipient status (DGR6966) as endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO).

In addition, Aspect holds NSW Charitable Fundraising Authority Number 10991, ACT Charitable Collection Authority Number 19000299, Victorian Fundraising Registration Number 10688, QLD Certificate of Registration as a Charity Number CH2466, WA Charitable Collections Licence CC21640 and SA Collections for Charitable Purposes Licence Number CCP3486; and is registered to collect charitable donations within Tasmania (fundraising number C/10209). Aspect is also authorised to fundraise in the Northern Territory.

Aspect promotes an awareness and understanding of the national and state-based Carers Recognition Acts.

In preparing the annual report for the year ending December 2023, we have reduced our impact on the environment by retaining it on our website and producing only a limited number of copies in print.

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a different
brilliant®
Understanding,
engaging and celebrating
the strengths, interests
and aspirations of people
on the autism spectrum.

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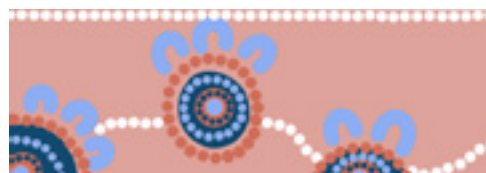
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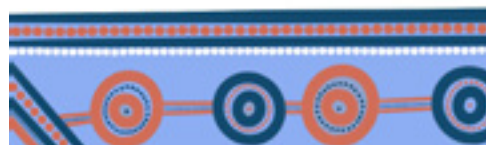


Aspect (Autism Spectrum Australia) acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the many lands on which we work and live. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

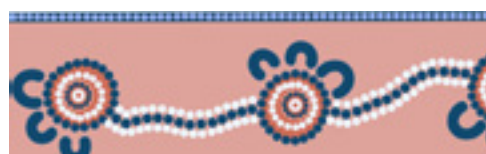


About our artwork...

We are thrilled to present a series of four artworks created by Brittney Paulson of Ukamirra Art, embodying our vibrant new brand colours and the essence of inclusion, understanding, and positivity that is at the heart of Aspect.



Within these artworks, circles serve as gathering spaces, while the U shapes represent communities uniting with optimism and purpose. The trails between these gatherings reflect how far we have come on our journey.



Each piece is a celebration of togetherness, showcasing the strength of our community and inspiring confidence and a positive outlook. This collaboration does more than just enrich our visual identity—it reinforces our commitment to building a diverse and inclusive environment.

We thank Brittney Paulson for this inspired collection.

INCLUSION STATEMENT

Everybody is welcome at Aspect.

We want you to feel it is OK to be authentically yourself. Please let us know if there is anything we can do that helps to include you in the training/meeting. Everyone is welcome to use their own strategies to help them feel relaxed.

The Inclusion Statement was co-developed by Autistic and non-Autistic staff in 2020. It facilitates better participation by letting people know they are welcome to be their authentic selves and encouraging them to do whatever they need to feel comfortable.

The statement is read at the beginning of formal meetings and acknowledges that strategies, such as walking around, using a fidget toy, turning off a camera during a Zoom meeting, or simply recognising that there is a child in the background, can help some people feel more productively engaged with a meeting or event.

This statement highlights the importance of a culture of inclusion and the need to explicitly communicate this inclusion with our staff and stakeholders. The statement is also proudly displayed at all Aspect schools and offices across Australia.

A year of resilience and growth...

For the first time as Chair of the Aspect Board, I am proud to present the 2023 Annual Impact Report, celebrating our achievements across the year.

As we reflect on the year that has been, it's clear that the pace of change and the scale of challenges we've faced is escalating.

Yet, within this fluctuating environment, Aspect has not only navigated the challenges with resilience but has also set a direction for impactful growth. The external environment has been rapidly evolving, marked by landmark reviews and reforms that are shaping the future of disability and education services in Australia. This backdrop of change has strengthened our determination to adapt and lead to ensure that we deliver against our vision of creating the best opportunities for people on the autism spectrum.

Embracing sector reform

The past year has been significant in terms of policy and regulatory shifts, with the Disability Royal Commission (DRC) and the NDIS Review steering the discussions towards substantial reform. The development of a National Autism Strategy which was announced in 2022, is a major step forward for people on the autism spectrum. The strategy aims to enhance life outcomes for Autistic Australians by establishing a unified national framework for services and supports.

These developments, while still unfolding, highlight a collective move towards a more inclusive and supportive system for people with a disability. Aspect has been at the forefront, engaging with these changes and advocating for the interests of those we serve.

The Better and Fairer Education System Review, initiated by an expert panel of Commonwealth, State, and Territory Education Ministers, aims to shape the next intergovernmental schools' agreement. It will no doubt include discussions around the level of funding and how this funding is spent, which is foundational to the success of our schools.

A year of financial strength

Aspect's financial resilience, as demonstrated this year, has been outstanding. With revenue growing to \$146.85 million, we've been able to further our strategic goals and expand our service reach.

Total comprehensive income reached \$30.24 million, an increase from \$21.17 million in 2022. This financial strength positions Aspect to be able to respond proactively to NDIS reforms and forecast educational funding reduction in coming years. I extend my congratulations to the Aspect team for this achievement, which demonstrates operational efficiency and skilful stewardship of Aspect's resources.

This year, our fundraising efforts delivered \$6.22 million – an increase of \$0.52 million from the previous year which will greatly assist Aspect in broadening our reach and deepening our impact. We are truly grateful to all our dedicated donors, whose committed support plays an integral role in Aspect's financial health and future aspirations.



Advancing our vision through Capital Works

As we enter the fourth year of our Capital Works Master Plan, the vision we've been fostering is becoming a reality. We've completed significant refurbishments at Aspect Vern Barnett School, Aspect South Coast School, Aspect Central Coast School, Aspect Macarthur School, and Aspect Hunter School, as well as the strategic acquisition of a new site in Port Macquarie NSW for educational expansion. Major works at Aspect Western Sydney School were initiated this year, anticipated for completion in 2024. Central to our mission is the creation of modern, autism-friendly learning environments where our students and staff can thrive.

Strategic direction and Board evolution

The year also marked the beginning of our new strategic direction, with the launch of our 2023 – 2025 Strategic Plan. This plan not only reflects past learnings and achievements but also sets a clear path for future growth and impact.

The Board has seen significant changes, with the retirement of Annette Gallard and Robert Dolk. Annette served on the Board for ten years, capably leading the organisation as Board Chair from 2020–2023. Robert joined the Board in 2019, chairing the Education Strategy Oversight Committee of Aspect's Capital Works program. We thank them both for their invaluable contributions. We also warmly welcomed two new Board members. Georgina Harrison, who joined the board in November 2023, has over 20 years' experience leading public policy reform around areas including disability and education. Jenny Bridge, who joined in December 2023, has over 20 years of operational and consulting experience in education, government, commercial and not-for-profit organisations. Both Georgina and Jenny will bring valuable expertise and vision to drive Aspect forward.

In closing

As we look ahead, my sincere thanks go to my fellow office bearers, committee chairs and members of the Board for their hard work, exceptional vision and continued strong direction.

I also want to thank Aspect's dedicated and innovative Executive team, led by Jacqui Borland, that has provided exceptional leadership to Aspect staff during what has been another unprecedented year.

Paul Khoury
Chair of the Aspect Board



Providing the best supports and services...

With a backdrop of massive shifts in the sector outlined in the message from our Chair, I am incredibly proud of the achievements Aspect has delivered in 2023. Our internal focus has continued to be on delivering exceptional education, individual and community services along with our commitment to making Australia more autism-friendly and building capabilities to better serve our community.

This is underpinned by our work to continually improve our practice, applying the latest evidence and knowledge through research and evaluation. Providing the best supports and services to people on the autism spectrum has been at the heart of everything we do since 1966.

The Aspect team has once again demonstrated their resilience and flexibility in the face of change. With much of the work we have started in 2023 extending into 2024, we will need to continue to stretch ourselves to ensure we not only deliver on our strategic and business plan initiatives, but remain relevant and viable for the long term.

New strategic direction

The strategic roadmap for 2023–2025 outlines four pivotal strategies. These reflect our ongoing adaptability to the evolving external environment, highlighting our commitment to quality services, strategic partnerships, enhancing community understanding of autism, and fostering innovation. The progress we've made this year is an exceptional example of our teamwork and determination and is detailed in the Annual Impact Report.

Delivering educational excellence

Under the strong leadership of our Aspect Principals and Education team, we've delivered autism-specific education to over 1,240 students across our schools in NSW and SA. Our engagement with Dr Lyn Sharratt in 2023 emphasises our focus on quality teaching and learning aimed at driving continuous improvement of our school program, improving student outcomes (numeracy and literacy) and demonstrating each student's development and learning progression.

Transforming Individual and Community Services

Despite having to navigate ongoing workforce issues, NDIS pricing challenges, the DRC and the NDIS review recommendations, our Individual and Community Services (ICS) delivered services to over 3,480 participants across Assessments, Therapy, Adult Community Services and Positive Behaviour Support. This is a remarkable achievement amidst a significant transformation project aimed at making processes and systems more efficient.

July marked a significant shift as we re-evaluated Aspect Employment in light of NDIS pricing. The decision to close this service, though difficult, is a step towards reimagining our employment support models to better serve our community in the future.

A boost for our Capital Works program

A significant milestone in our Capital Works journey has been the Western Sydney Infrastructure Grants program (WSIG), which bolstered our efforts with a \$13.2 million grant. This funding is a cornerstone for the development of a new, purpose-built school in the Hills Shire and the launch of a first-of-its-kind Individual and Community Services hub in Liverpool, marking a significant advancement in our commitment to providing supports and services to people on the autism spectrum where they are needed most.

Building autism-friendly environments

One of the biggest barriers for people on the autism spectrum is not autism itself, but rather the environment that is not tailored to their needs. Our work in making environments more autism-friendly has gained remarkable momentum. The increasing demand from various sectors for our expertise signifies a growing awareness of autism and neurodiversity as well as recognition of the importance of building inclusive communities and environments. Some of our major work in 2023 included working with Disney, Stockland, Australian Airports Association, Suncorp Stadium and many more.

Working in partnership

From the moment I stepped into the role of CEO in 2019, one of my priorities has been to continue Aspect's commitment to inclusion and diversity. Working in partnership with people on the autism spectrum at every level—from governance to service delivery and beyond – is a fundamental element of Aspect's DNA.

The Aspect Advisory Council has continued to be instrumental in shaping our strategic vision, offering insights and advice from people with lived experience. After a major review of the Council in 2022, the focus for this year was around improving administration processes and strengthening ways of working with the Board and across Aspect. The Communications Working Group, in particular, was key in crafting the award-winning World Autism Understanding Day campaign in 2023, a great example of what we can achieve together.



Thank you

I would like to acknowledge and thank all the staff at Aspect for their passion and dedication. Our services are dependent on the people who deliver them and I am amazed and humbled by the work they do every day.

I would also like to recognise the Aspect Board of Directors who generously give their time and expertise. I thank Annette Gallard and Robert Dolk for their tireless contribution and warmly welcome our new Board members.

To our Executive team and Leadership Network, I extend my gratitude for your dedication, flexibility and unwavering support through a period of immense change.

To the families, students, and participants who we have the privilege of supporting through our services, thank you for placing your trust with Aspect. We remain, now and always, committed to understanding, engaging and celebrating the strengths, interests and aspirations of people on the autism spectrum.

Jacqui Borland
Chief Executive Officer

Stepping into a new aspect

From modest beginnings, our story began when the pioneering autism-specific school in Forestville opened its doors to five students. This marked the start of an incredible journey over more than half a decade.

Founded in 1966 by Dr Andrew Vern Barnett, Aspect has grown from an idea that originated from a group of passionate parents on Sydney's Northern Beaches, into a beacon of support for thousands of people on the autism spectrum across Australia. Over our 57 year history, Aspect has made remarkable progress, embracing transformative changes, innovating and expanding to better meet the needs of Autistic people.

Today, as we continue to navigate a dynamic and constantly changing world, we want our brand to reflect our strategic direction, as well as the broad reach and depth of our impact.

Our brand refresh is not just an updated logo; it's a declaration of our identity, values and commitment to the community we serve.

The new Aspect brand is a testament to our professional yet approachable reputation, designed to resonate with people on the autism spectrum of all ages and their families.

At the heart of our refresh lies our core promise to every individual we support: to understand, engage and celebrate the strengths, interests and aspirations of people on the autism spectrum. This promise is captured in our purpose, "a different brilliant®," championing the unique contributions and potential of every Autistic person.

Our visual language, from the cool and calming colours to the bold imagery and simplified iconography, speaks to our values of being passionate about people, about being positive and about what's possible. It reflects our commitment to recognising and embracing the individuality of each person we support.

This journey of transformation and growth reflects not just where we have come from and our past achievements but also our future aspirations.

Join us on our journey!

Aspect continues to be one of Australia's leading providers of autism-specific education and support services. Our 2023-2025 Strategic Plan aims to shape and progress our vision, while building on our 55+ years of experience in delivering evidence-based knowledge, informed by lived experience. It provides revised priorities that reflect the changes in the external environment and a renewed focus on innovation to take us into the future.

Our strategic plan

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Satisfaction of our stakeholders

How many people we impact through our schools, services, programs and resources

Outcomes achieved by our students and participants

Reports on impact and change in the broader community from our partnerships and programs that drive inclusion for all Autistic people.

OUR ENABLERS

People, business development and marketing, fundraising, and technology systems and facilities.



CORE STRATEGY 1:
Deliver evidence-based, high quality, highly valued autism-specific education and services for our students, participants, and their families.

- Review and transform Aspect services into efficient, sustainable models that meet the needs of the people we support
- Develop and evaluate specialised programs for specific cohorts of Autistic children and adults
- Deeply understand transition pathways and what supports are needed, develop and pilot programs of support.



CORE STRATEGY 3:
Develop community understanding about autism to create a more inclusive world.

- Invest in strategic partnerships to expand and scale our autism-friendly consulting business
- Develop a business model for Individual and Community Capacity Building services with a clear value offer.



CORE STRATEGY 2:
Build new opportunities and create greater impact through strong partnerships.

- Work in partnership with Autistic people throughout Aspect (in governance, service planning and delivery, and research)
- Develop and refine our partnership model in education, therapy, and individual and community capacity building initiatives
- Develop and pilot business partnerships for new products and services.



CORE STRATEGY 4:
Position Aspect for a strong future through innovation.

- Develop an innovation framework to test, trial and evaluate new initiatives
- Create a product/service development framework and prioritisation model
- Build a culture of innovation and continuous improvement at grassroots level.



Every aspect of our impact

Revenue
 **\$146.85m**

Schools and satellite classes 
9 schools
>100 satellites



Locations

78



Students
(main campus and satellite)

1,243



Participants

3,481

Website visits
(across the year)

532,798



Enquiries



10,800



Social Media followers

197,147



Mentions
in the media

767

People reached
through all media

23 million



Podcast
downloads

20,256

People receiving
external newsletter

5,825



Assessments completed

1,029

Therapy hours

67,097
(including PBS)

Workshops and
webinar participants

4,000

Teletherapy hours provided

4,830





Delivering quality services

Building on our foundation as Australia's leading educators for students on the autism spectrum, we introduced an innovative professional learning program – the Aspect Learning Improvement Collaborative (ALIC). Launched with the 2023 school year, ALIC marks a ground-breaking step forward in enhancing educational practices within autism-specific learning environments.

Advancing autism-specific education



Far from being a conventional professional development initiative, ALIC is a pioneering approach designed to refine and advance classroom practices through a model of continuous improvement. It aims to strengthen Aspect educators' knowledge of teaching in an autism-specific context, while increasing and measuring student growth and achievement.

At its heart is a mission to champion personalised learning paths, ensuring each student's individual learning needs are known and understood so that critical 'next steps' are implemented. This is achieved by 'putting faces' on school data to inform school and system improvement.

ALIC represents Aspect's most ambitious professional learning program to date, spanning nine schools and involving over 700 dedicated staff members over two years. What's more, we have partnered with globally renowned educator Dr Lyn Sharratt, whose educational principles align seamlessly with Aspect's philosophy of creating inclusive, equitable and supportive learning environments.

Excitingly, ALIC stands as a global first, integrating principles of an evidence-proven framework for highly effective schools into an autism-specific learning environment.

Key to the initiative's framework is the establishment of baseline data on individual student progress, enabling the development of tailored instructional strategies. But ALIC goes beyond the classroom; we've also fostered a robust online Professional Learning Community (PLC), serving as a hub for dialogue and celebration of program milestones.

Throughout the two-year journey, educators will engage in dynamic in-person sessions, online consultations, and immersive workshops and learning fairs, all orchestrated to promote sustained progress.

"The collaboration with Aspect is truly exciting as we adapt a tried and tested system and school improvement framework in an autism-specific learning environment. It is possible our partnership could lead to a best practice standard for autism-specific schools globally."

DR LYN SHARRATT
International Consultant, Sharratt Educational Group Inc.





Innovative models to support staff and participants now and in the future

Due to the constantly evolving landscape in which our NDIS services operate and current nationwide staff shortages, it was determined as part of an audit that in order to remain financially sustainable and continue to provide quality, evidence-based supports to Autistic participants, we would need to review current operating procedures, internal processes and systems within our Individual and Community Services (ICS).

In January 2023, we established a steering committee to provide governance and approve the approach, resourcing, strategic decision-making, risk management and prioritisation, and to build alignment and shared understanding across the organisation.

The strategic goals for the ICS Transformation included staff having the tools required to deliver the best possible service to participants, and for a seamless participant pathway to access valued services.

A total of 15 programs were identified to meet these goals by June 2025, with five projects selected as a priority to commence the first phase of the overall transformation. The key benefits and outcomes of the projects will increase customer and staff satisfaction, sustainability, productivity and optimisation.

Excitingly, three of the five projects were completed in December and ready for implementation in 2024:

- > **Refreshed supervision and training model**
An updated model of supervision and training that supports current staff to achieve their goals more efficiently, and allows new employees to build their caseload effectively and sooner, within a supportive environment. Professional development programs and wellness days were also extended to further support staff learning and wellbeing.
- > **Rewards and recognition program**
This project is part of an overarching Workforce Strategy and is an important component to the way Aspect attracts and retains high-performing, capable employees who are passionate about Aspect's purpose. In 2024, we will host our inaugural annual recognition awards to recognise and acknowledge the amazing work and innovative approaches staff utilise to support participants and the ICS business.
- > **Talent sourcing**
To address both employee retention and talent attraction, a scholarship program will be introduced in 2024 to attract graduates studying in allied health that meet the qualifications and criteria.

Breaking new ground in autism research

With seven research projects completed and five more making significant inroads, Aspect Research Centre for Autism Practice (ARCAP) has contributed to the academic field and accelerated the delivery of solutions to everyday challenges experienced by Autistic people and their families.

From enhancing the autism knowledge of Aspect's educators, to exploring Autistic participation in physical activity, and pioneering new areas of research in disclosure and self-compassion of Autistic adults, our work this year has been diverse and impactful.

Expanding strategic partnerships

ARCAP's collaborative efforts were notably strong in 2023, as we joined forces with esteemed national and international entities. Our synergies with organisations such as the Australian Federal Police, Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne and Drexel University in Philadelphia, as well as leaders in Australia's autism research space, have fortified our research capabilities and extended our reach into emerging areas of research.

Engagement and dissemination

The ARCAP team has demonstrated publishing prowess, successfully authoring 19 articles in peer-reviewed journals, writing a book chapter and making a significant contribution to a textbook on autism. Our researchers also featured in reputable mainstream media, including *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Age* and *The Conversation*, as well as ABC TV and Radio.

Each researcher attended national and international conferences and symposia, sharing their knowledge and insights with the wider research community and other stakeholders. Invitations from organisers of key events such as the Sydney University Loneliness Symposium, Department of Criminal Justice Countering Violent Extremism Conference, Euregionaal Congresburo – Annual Congress and the Australian Society for Autism Research Conference, highlight ARCAP's standing as an influential thought leader in specific domains of autism research.

In 2023, ARCAP hosted three well-attended webinars on creating an autism-friendly society, social media conversations about Autistic disclosure and burnout, loneliness, as well as a professional workshop on the Aspect Self-Compassion Program for Autistic Adults (ASPAA), which targeted mental health workers.

By responding to 64 research inquiries from Aspect staff and conducting webinars and workshops, we strengthened the evidence base of Aspect practice and helped to foster a culture of continuous learning.

Accolades

The year concluded with two awards acknowledging the achievements of ARCAP's Research Fellows. Dr Ru Ying Cai and Dr Chris Edwards were honoured with the Autism CRC Achievement in Autism Research Award (Translation of Autism Research) for their ground-breaking project, "Improving the mental health of Autistic adults through the cultivation of self-compassion". Dr Chris Edwards also received an Autism Queensland Limited award (Individual Achievement 18+), recognising his remarkable contributions to the Autistic community through research.

Grants and commission

With assistance from Aspect Fundraising, ARCAP secured significant grants from the Victorian State Government Diverse Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Grants Program and the auDA Foundation 2023 Community Grants. These funds will support an Australian-first project exploring the experiences of Autistic women during pregnancy and early parenthood. Also during 2023, we were commissioned by the Centre for Inclusive Supports Inc. to evaluate the impact of its Uni Life program on the lives of Autistic youth with intellectual disability.

IMPACT	Completed and ongoing projects	Internal research enquiries	Journal articles	Conference presentations	ARCAP workshops & webinars	Total number of research participants
	12	64	19	11	4	1,844





Listening to the voice of our customer

At Aspect, the voice of our community – students, participants, and their families – is not just important; it’s imperative.

Listening to their experiences provides us with invaluable insights; allowing us to streamline their journey and navigate challenges. Gathering feedback from our customers is not new to Aspect, however, in a significant stride towards enhancing our responsiveness, we launched a new process in March 2023.

Feedback is now automatically collected following any interaction with Aspect. This new system allows us to capture insights more efficiently. So far, we have rolled this out for customer enquiries and autism assessments with a plan to include all our services in 2024.


But our commitment goes beyond transactional interactions. We understand that building strong relationships with our students, participants and their families is crucial. A bi-annual survey is sent to every family to gain a comprehensive understanding of how we can enrich their overall experience with Aspect.

This feedback serves as our guide for continuous improvement and ensures we make the necessary adjustments to meet the needs of our customers, every step of the way.

IMPACT


HOW DID WE SCORE?
An NPS score above 0 is good, above 20 is great, above 50 is amazing, and above 80 is world class.

Relationship NPS




+50

Enquiries NPS



+48

Assessments NPS



+79



Exploring an ocean of opportunity:

Meet Rocky

Rocky is fascinated by the ocean, and loves nothing more than exploring the shoreline and diving into the waves at his local beach – even in the middle of winter.

Rocky had delayed speech and at two years of age, he had a hearing test and began speech therapy. At this point, nobody had mentioned autism – his parents, Raegan and Craig, thought Rocky was just a late talker.

When Rocky started preschool, his little world expanded from being just him and his family. He found the new environment challenging and was non-verbal in the classroom. The preschool educator suggested the school psychologist observe Rocky. The next morning she gently suggested to Raegan, “I think you might be looking at autism.”

“I didn’t even know what autism meant,” recalls Raegan. “We knew if we embraced his diagnosis that would be the most positive step in helping Rocky.”

After Rocky received his assessment and diagnosis, his family was able to access NDIS funding and essential autism-specific support and therapy, which has been invaluable to his development.

Raegan says, “Our aim as Rocky’s family has always been to educate ourselves about life on the autism spectrum and do as much as we possibly can to support him.”

Three years of tailored support including speech therapy, occupational therapy and psychology have made an incredible difference to Rocky’s learning and regulation.

Rocky began attending an Aspect school in February 2023.

With specialist support in an autism-specific learning environment, Rocky is communicating what he wants through his iPad (Proloquo2Go program), visual cards and using simple sentences. He follows the daily structure of the classroom and is eager to learn all about the pictures on his desk, especially if they are of the ocean.



Nurturing powerful partnerships



In 2023, we embarked on an exciting journey with the University of Wollongong (UOW), Charles Sturt University (CSU) and Victoria University (VU), reinforcing our dedication to building new opportunities and creating greater impact through strong partnerships.

A new era for Aspect Education

Through the Principals of Cooperation agreements, we have extended our footprint by integrating two new campuses for Aspect South Coast School and Aspect Riverina School within the vibrant campuses of UOW, Wollongong and CSU, Wagga Wagga.

This strategic expansion not only enhances access to quality education for students on the autism spectrum, but also promotes a rich exchange of knowledge and professional development opportunities for our staff, students and university affiliates.

These partnerships usher in a new era of educational environments that offer a range of benefits. Students and staff will enjoy access to university campus amenities, including The Early Start Discovery Space, comprehensive library facilities, cafés, sporting complexes and expansive grounds. This initiative opens doors for our older students to explore pathways and volunteering opportunities on campus, enhancing their educational journey and broadening their horizons.

Additionally, staff will be able to participate in university seminars and joint celebrations, encouraging deeper integration and collaboration. In return, UOW and CSU will be enriched by specialised training sessions led by Aspect.

These sessions will offer master's and postgraduate students valuable insights through case studies, demonstration classrooms and guest lectures. Transition programs conducted by Aspect staff will introduce school students to campus life, and our educators can contribute their expertise in shaping teaching modules for undergraduate and postgraduate students. A key feature of these partnerships is the co-creation of communication guidelines with Autistic individuals, ensuring the programs' relevance and consistency.

Our contribution extends beyond the classroom, sharing expertise from our Aspect Research Centre for Autism Practice (ARCAP) and Autism Friendly consultancy programs while UOW and CSU will provide guest lecturers, practical placements and professional development opportunities.

These partnerships signify a commitment to creating inclusive environments and expanding opportunities for individuals on the autism spectrum, aligning with our mission and values.





Partnership leads to new ACS centre in Melbourne

In 2022, Aspect and Victoria University (VU) signed a five-year partnership agreement aimed at providing on-campus opportunities for students in allied health and community services.

This collaboration offers practical experiences through placements, internships and employment opportunities with Aspect. The partnership also included the establishment of an innovative autism service hub at VU, enabling Autistic adults to access campus facilities and pursue accredited qualifications.

One year on, the partnership has already made significant strides, including the official opening of our Adult Community Services (ACS) Centre at VU's St Albans Campus. The centre, which employs 18 staff, offers much-needed services for Autistic adults in western Melbourne.

VU and Aspect acknowledged the opening through a joint event in June, which saw more than 50 members of the community attend, including Aspect Board Directors, VU Vice and Deputy Vice Chancellors, the Mayor of Brimbank City Council and local Member of Parliament for St Albans.

Throughout the partnership, both organisations have profiled the successful outcomes through social media, as well as traditional print and online media.

In the year ahead, Aspect and VU will focus on joint research opportunities and our participants will be able to study at VU to gain TAFE qualifications, such as a Certificate I in Work Education or a Certificate I in Transitions Education.

Working in partnership

Aspect has always been committed to working in partnership with people on the autism spectrum at every level of our organisation, ensuring their voices and experiences influence our strategic direction and decision-making processes.

That's why we set up the Aspect Advisory Council (AAC) in 2017. This decision was one of the most significant reforms ever in Aspect's governance framework. It provides a platform for Autistic people to make a real difference right up at the top with our Board and Executive team.

In 2023, the AAC met four times. After one member stepped down, and following a review in 2022, we spent most of the year refreshing the council based on the review recommendations. The council co-developed a welcome pack for new members and set up a new way to bring members on board. This recruitment process is currently underway. They also played a pivotal role in strategic discussions regarding the Disability Royal Commission's (DRC) recommendations on specialist education settings as well as the ongoing contribution to Aspect's strategic priorities.

Going forward, we want the AAC to have an even bigger impact. We're planning to build stronger ties not just with the Board, but also with our Executive team, managers, services, and the broader Aspect community.

Strengthening outcomes for young Autistic people

Funded by the Australian Government's Department of Education, Positive Partnerships is implemented by Aspect and works with families, educational institutions and communities to strengthen positive outcomes for young individuals on the autism spectrum. Our focus is on creating connections and opportunities for inclusion where Autistic students can thrive.

Through an array of professional development resources – including workshops, webinars, and online learning modules – we empower parents, caregivers and educators, strengthening their capacity to support and advocate for young Autistic people.

Since our inception in 2008, Positive Partnerships has provided an extensive range of resources tailored for educators and families. We offer interactive workshops and webinars addressing a variety of relevant topics, online modules, a richly resourced website, materials in over 20 languages, and specialised resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, demonstrating our commitment to inclusivity and accessibility.

The demand to access workshops remains strong and reflects the high quality of delivery and interaction we provide.





A more
inclusive
world



In 2023, Aspect Autism Friendly continued to work towards making Australia a place where every individual on the autism spectrum feels valued and understood.

A journey towards an autism-friendly Australia

Our three-year strategic plan focuses on expanding our reach, measuring our impact on partners and Autistic individuals and their families, and growing our revenue to enhance our work.

Significant improvements included streamlining service efficiency and cost-effectiveness. A key development was the new Relationship and Business Improvement Manager role, which has elevated our customer service and operational standards.

We collaborated with 45 organisations across New South Wales, Victoria, and Queensland, effecting community changes like quiet rooms in stadiums and more inclusive airports and schools. Our autism-friendly employment initiatives have also advanced through impactful training sessions.

In April, our team shaped the World Autism Understanding Day campaign and supported Aspect Philanthropy's Art and Autism event at the Art Gallery of NSW, featuring Autistic artists and staff.

November saw a new partnership with Disney for an autism-friendly performance of "Beauty and the Beast," tailored for sensory sensitivities with modifications to the show and venue, including a pre-show welcome session and adjustments during the performance for a more comfortable experience.

The Sunflowers in Sydney program expanded to include nine new sporting organisations, enhancing our support and developing best practice guidelines for sport. In collaboration with Aspect Research Centre for Autism Practice (ARCAP), we gained insights into the barriers Autistic individuals face in sports, initiating an online training module for coaches on inclusivity.

IMPACT

45

Organisations worked with Autism Friendly across NSW, VIC and QLD

1,792

Requests for Autism Alert card

2,269

People trained through Autism Friendly and Sunflowers in Sydney

19

Organisations who took up Sunflowers in Sydney program (9 new and 10 existing with continued support)



3.

From awareness to understanding

Despite widespread awareness, there remains a significant gap in understanding the lived experiences of Autistic individuals.

Aspect has taken a bold step to bridge this gap by transforming the narrative from awareness to understanding and inclusion. Our annual campaign, guided by the principle that true understanding fosters deeper empathy, is led by the voices of people on the autism spectrum, offering an authentic glimpse into their lives.

With rebranding the United Nations’ World Autism Awareness Day to World Autism Understanding Day (WAUD), we have shifted the focus towards education. Authenticity was essential so the campaign idea and content was co-designed, co-developed and co-delivered with the Autistic community.

The campaign idea was aimed at drawing the community in to find out more.

“If you find out I’m Autistic, I want you to know ...”

This simple statement had the power to achieve all objectives, by enabling Autistic people to “speak” to the general public and authentically share what they want others to understand about autism.

The campaign’s impact exceeded our expectations, engaging over 2.3 million Australians. The increase in website traffic and increased downloads of our resources highlighted a growing desire among the public to deepen their understanding of autism. Encouraged by this success, we submitted the campaign to the Australian Marketing Institute’s (AMI) Annual Marketing Excellence Awards. We were named a finalist in the “Non-For-Profit” category and were thrilled to win not only this award, but also the award for “National Marketing Campaign of the Year – up to \$1M”. Receiving these accolades from the industry filled us with immense pride, especially considering the number of submissions from distinguished Australian and international organisations and marketing agencies.



IMPACT AT A GLANCE	
People reached with WAUD	Radio stations who broadcast our top tips
2.3m	17
People reached through social media for WAUD	Visits to WAUD page
386k	15k
Downloads of partnership pack	Fact sheet downloads
3,080	2.6k

“Fabulous campaign and loved hearing the voices and lived experiences of the Autistic community. Thank you for sharing your insight to help promote understanding every single day of the year.”

“This is so insightful. Thank you for sharing. It has totally inspired me!”

“Brilliant campaign. Autism definitely comes with “superpower strengths” that shine through when we embrace them. Thank you for helping build understanding and acceptance around autism!”

“I want to extend my deepest appreciation for the support that you have given us to enable us to address an area of great need in the community. We are sure that as a result of the education campaign, there has been a marked increase in community understanding of autism and neurodiversity thereby breaking down the general misconceptions held.”

DR NADA ROUDE
Program Manager of Tripoli and Mena Association

Working with Sydney’s Arabic community

Aspect joined forces with the Tripoli and Mena Association, to conduct a series of educational workshops for the Arabic-speaking community. The workshops were designed to bridge gaps in awareness and challenge myths and misconceptions. They also provided information about who to contact for a diagnosis, supports and services available, and creating a community through linking families with shared experiences.

From February to September, our therapists delivered multiple workshops to educators, support workers, community leaders, senior citizens, case managers, foster carers, parents and teachers. These sessions covered information about autism and neurodiversity, common traits and characteristics of autism, as well as assessment and diagnosis. They also explored sensory processing and emotional regulation differences as well as communication and play.



IMPACT	Workshops held	Participants
	15	250



Innovating
every
aspect



Aspect has been successful in receiving two grants from the Western Sydney Infrastructure Grants (WSIG) program. The \$2 billion program is funding transformational infrastructure projects to improve liveability across Western Sydney.

Aspect receives funding from Western Sydney Infrastructure Grants

Purpose-built autism-specific campus to open in 2025

Aspect received \$5 million to build a new two-storey state-of-the-art primary school in Box Hill within The Hills Shire Council. The 3050m² site is located within 'The Gables', a vibrant new suburb that is owned and developed by Stockland.

The property has been strategically selected within the education precinct to address the growing and immediate need for specialist autism education in the Hills District of Sydney and surrounding areas. The new campus will cater for 72 students on the autism spectrum from Kindergarten to Year 6.

Purpose-built using sustainable, environmentally friendly materials, the plans include 12 classrooms, a multipurpose hall, covered sensory outdoor area, computer room, life skills kitchen and library. It will feature 'next-gen' technology, digital educational materials and adaptable equipment that will engage our Autistic students in their learning. The future-focused design will create flexible spaces that will meet the needs of children on the autism spectrum both now and into the future. The new school will also provide job opportunities for 30 educators, teacher's aides and admin roles.

New Community Connection Hub

Aspect received \$8.2 million to build a first-of-its-kind Community Connection Hub in Liverpool NSW, having identified a significant need for autism-specific services in the area due to long waitlists for both autism assessments and therapy services.

The Community Connection Hub will include an assessment clinic, therapy rooms, multi-purpose spaces which can cater for group programs and social activities, educational workshops for learning life skills and job seeking, an all-inclusive sensory playground catering for the physical needs of participants, as well as an undercover outdoor recreational space.

Opening in late 2026, the hub will be co-designed with people on the autism spectrum to create an inclusive, autism-friendly and safe space where services can be accessed to build independence, emotional resilience and physical wellbeing, as well as establishing positive connections within the wider community.

"Our vision for the Community Connection Hub is an incubator for change, building community understanding of neurodiversity and the autism spectrum, while providing an inclusive and social place to access services and support. This will improve the quality of life outcomes for people on the autism spectrum, their families, and carers within the Western Sydney region."

RACHEL KERSLAKE
National Director, Individual and Community Services





Transforming lives through self-compassion

Stemming from a pioneering study by Aspect Research Centre for Autism Practice (ARCAP), which revealed that self-compassion enhances the mental health and psychological wellbeing of Autistic adults, we developed the **Aspect Self-Compassion Program for Autistic Adults (ASPAA)**.

A trial of ASPAA among a group of 39 Autistic adults over a five-week period showed participants became significantly more self-compassionate, had more positive emotions and higher psychological well-being, and had fewer negative emotions and fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression.

To date, the program has reached a milestone with over 700 Autistic adults embracing the journey to self-compassion, supported by modules designed to deepen their understanding and daily practices aimed at improving self-compassion skills.

In parallel, a clinician version of ASPAA has also been developed for therapists, clinicians, psychologists and mental health professionals, which includes additional instructions to allow clinicians to tailor the modules to best support their clients.

Bridging the loneliness divide

In collaboration with global experts, ARCAP is pioneering exploration into the measurement of loneliness among Autistic adults.

To extend the research in this field, it is important that the tools used to measure loneliness are valid for Autistic adults. Currently, research has relied on loneliness measures that were developed for the general population. Autistic adults have provided feedback on these existing measures and reported difficulties, citing confusing terms and phrases. They also expressed dissatisfaction with the way in which the measures reflected their personal experiences of loneliness. Given these concerns, we aim to develop and validate an accessible measure of loneliness for Autistic adults.

To conduct this research study, we consulted with 10 Autistic adults and 13 experts to gather feedback on existing measures. They helped us adapt a measure of loneliness. Then, we collected data from 628 individuals across the globe including 416 Autistic individuals and 212 individuals who are not Autistic.

Preliminary analysis of this data suggests that our new inclusive measure has good psychometric properties and can be used to accurately measure loneliness in both Autistic and non-Autistic individuals. Our research also revealed higher levels of loneliness among Autistic adults, highlighting the importance of further research into ways of supporting the mental health and wellbeing of Autistic individuals experiencing loneliness.

Supporting people to thrive:

Meet Stephanie

A recent Victoria University (VU) graduate, Stephanie Bolondo has joined our **Aspect Adult Community Services Centre in Hawthorn, Melbourne**.

Stephanie completed a dual degree in Bachelor of Psychological Studies/Bachelor of Business at VU. Having learned about the partnership between our organisations, Stephanie chose Aspect over other support providers due to our individualised approach with participants.

"Aspect puts a strong focus on the participants learning and capacity-building skills. Looking at the Aspect website, there was a lot of language around goals, skill development and education. Reflecting on what I had learned during my time at VU, I knew that Aspect's values would align closely with my own. I felt that the knowledge acquired in my degree had prepared me for a role at a place like Aspect. So when a position opened up, I went for it."

Stephanie is now a Disability Support Worker supporting our participants to take part in a variety of learning programs.

She has been able to apply the skills and theories taught in her degree and is continuing to build on these skills. For example, Stephanie has applied her knowledge of theories of behaviour to help better support participants. Her know-how has enabled her to understand the underlying physiological and psychological reasons behind certain behaviours, and has provided her with a variety of different ways to approach and support participants.

"I really enjoy working with the participants. Every participant I've worked with is unique, with different talents and their own special interests – all of which should be celebrated and embraced. With so many wonderful personalities at Aspect, no two days are the same."

For Stephanie, the partnership between Aspect and VU has been an exciting development because of the many career opportunities it creates for students.



Fundraising: Extending reach and impact

We would like to extend a big thank you to all of our supporters!

<p>For Aspect, fundraising and philanthropy are much more than just funding avenues. They're the heartbeat of our purpose, enabling us to go above and beyond for people on the autism spectrum.</p> <p>Through generous support, we are able to cover programs not funded by government, lighten the financial burden for disadvantaged families and deliver research backed projects to support Autistic individuals.</p> <p>In 2023, thanks to our community of dedicated supporters and partners, we've raised an incredible \$6.2 million.</p> <p>This support has made a real difference in the lives of our students and participants.</p> <p>Every dollar raised is a step towards a future where no-one on the autism spectrum is left behind.</p>		<p>Revenue raised in appeals</p> <p>\$492,000</p> <p>Revenue raised from Golf Day for Vern Barnett School</p> <p>\$51,000</p> <p>Secured two Western Sydney Infrastructure Grants from NSW Government for an Individual Community Services Hub and The Hills Shire School</p> <p>\$1.8m (paid in 2023)</p> <p>\$13.2m Total</p>	
<p>Regular givers</p> <p>3,320</p>		<p>3 research projects funded by Woodend Foundation (Perpetual)</p> <p>\$50k</p>	<p>Autism assessments for 38 disadvantaged families funded by The Yeo Family</p> <p>\$50k</p>
<p>Revenue from Walk and Run campaigns</p> <p>\$2m</p>	<p>Participants in Walk and Run campaigns</p> <p>12,550</p>	<p>Upgrade of kitchen at Adult Community Services in Heatherton</p> <p>\$100,000</p>	
<p>Supporters responding to appeals</p> <p>5,522</p>		<p>Aspect Western Sydney High School's work education program funded by the Redan Foundation</p> <p>\$117,000</p>	

The evolution of Aspect's Work Education Program

Back in 2018, Aspect Education embarked on an ambitious journey to close the gap between high school and the wider world for Autistic students.

This pilot resulted in the Work Education Program at Aspect Western Sydney School, funded by the Redan Foundation. This program is tailored to provide a wide range of work experiences, guided by a dedicated specialist Work Education teacher and a teacher aide. Their focus is on transition planning into post-school life and coordinating delivery of the Work Skills Curriculum for students from Years 9 through to 12.

The essence of the program is its holistic approach, providing students with opportunities in practical work experience, enhancing their participation in the community and equipping them with essential life skills – from resume writing to securing relevant certifications like first aid and motor vehicle learners permits. The success stories from the Western Sydney Redan Program inspired the Greater Charitable Foundation to get involved, enabling the expansion of this invaluable program to Aspect Hunter School in 2021.

"Greater Charitable Foundation (GCF) has funded Aspect's Work Education & Employment Skills Program in the NSW Hunter Region for two-and-a-half years. This program is achieving outstanding results in providing autism-specific support to Aspect high school students to assist in their transition from school to employment. The program is designed to work alongside the students at their pace and provide them with the training, knowledge and skills needed to help them thrive in the world beyond school!"

ANNE LONG
CEO, Greater Charitable Foundation



IMPACT AT A GLANCE

<p>FINANCIAL SUPPORT:</p> <p>Since its inception, the Redan Foundation has awarded \$648,000 to the program, complemented by \$300,000 from the Greater Charitable Foundation since 2021.</p>
<p>STUDENT ENGAGEMENT:</p> <p>Over 200 students have participated in these programs.</p>
<p>WORK PLACEMENTS:</p> <p>In 2023, students participated in an average of four work placements each, ranging from well-known names like Coles, Officeworks and the Australian Museum, to unique ventures on a macadamia farm and with Snap Fitness.</p>
<p>CERTIFICATIONS ACHIEVED:</p> <p>Students have attained certificates in qualifications such as first aid, CPR and pre-apprenticeship courses.</p>
<p>EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES:</p> <p>A number of students have transitioned into part-time, volunteer or paid roles, a direct result of their participation in work experience or volunteer placements.</p>
<p>SKILLS DEVELOPMENT:</p> <p>Beyond work placements, students have engaged in a variety of activities aimed at building independence and vocational skills, including preparing for interviews, travel training, driving lessons, barista training and financial literacy.</p>

"The program which we have now supported for a number of years does great work with young Autistic school students. The work which Aspect does in preparing the students for life after school is well thought out and extremely well delivered."

RICHARD GELSKI
Chairman, The Redan Foundation

Our Supporters and Partners

Major Donors and Corporate support

- abrdn
- Baker Hughes Foundation
- Bruce & Rachel Gunter
- Chehab Foundation
- Clubs NSW
- CompNow
- Councils NSW
- Crouch Consulting Pty Ltd (Australian Sentinel)
- Davies Family Foundation
- Dee Why RSL Club Ltd
- Deloitte
- E A and N Hulak Foundation No 2
- Fidelity (FIL Investment)
- Foundation Theatres Pty Limited
- Greater Charitable Foundation
- Guy Reynolds AO & Jenny Reynolds
- HiSmile
- IFM Investors
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- Jensen Hughes
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- The Walter Richard Salmon Foundation
- VivCourt Trading Pty Ltd
- Waratah Education Foundation
- Western Sydney Wanderers FC
- Westpac
- Wests Tigers Rugby League Club
- Woodend Foundation (Perpetual)

In-kind

- Bunnings
- Crouch Consulting Pty Ltd /Australian Sentinel
- Deloitte
- Elato Ice Cream
- Fidelity (FIL Investment)
- Good360
- Google Australia
- Greater Charitable Foundation
- HiSmile
- Jensen Hughes
- Kicks Shoelaces
- Lido Cinema
- Mastercard
- Museum of Contemporary Art Australia
- NAB
- Netflix
- Newcastle Jets
- Public Sector People
- PwC
- Scentre Group (Westfield)
- University of Technology Sydney (UTS)
- Western Sydney Wanderers FC
- Westpac
- Wests Tigers Rugby League Club

Gift in Will

- Estate of Adrian van de Bunt
- Estate of Kathleen Breen
- Estate of the late Phillipa Barbara Walsh
- Estate of Roy Edward Williams
- Estate of the late Megan Patrice Carmody
- Estate of the late Melville Bruce Doughty
- Estate of the late Mary Jane Derrick
- Estate of Kathleen May Raven

Dreaming of life as a chef:

Meet Matthew

Matthew’s goal is to learn how to cook and make coffee so he can one day open his own café or restaurant.

Matthew is a participant at our Adult Community Services (ACS) centre in Hawthorn, Melbourne. Matthew’s goal is to learn how to cook and make coffee so he can one day open his own café or restaurant.

Our dedicated Aspect ACS team created two programs to support Matthew, a cooking program and “How to Hospo”. The How to Hospo program supports participants to develop hospitality skills including barista skills, customer service, hygiene, along with education around workplace health and safety. Little did the team know just how involved the local community would become!

The team spoke to Norm and Suzy, co-owners of local café, Sonny Ray, to request assistance with providing Matthew real-world experience. Through this, Sam Embray of Single O Coffee Roasters, also got involved, teaching Matthew how to use the espresso machine and make a good cuppa.

“It’s been a dream of mine to work in a restaurant or a café. I was very excited when Aspect created the How to Hospo program so I could learn how to make coffee and meet people in the community. I am able to talk with staff and customers at the café, which I really enjoy and look forward to.

The owners, Norm and Suzy, are so supportive and have even brought me into the café kitchen to learn from the chefs, which is a dream come true,” said Matthew.

Seeing the success, and knowing the program was only held every two weeks, Sam graciously donated a coffee machine to Aspect, so the participants can practise weekly – once at the centre and once at Sonny Ray.

“When I first learned about this program, I immediately wanted to assist and support Matthew’s passion through facilitation and training. But I’ve gained so much more insight and understanding about autism and how unique each person is and the different ideas and skills they bring. It’s a highlight of my week” states Sam.

“We feel privileged to be part of an initiative that is making a real difference in the lives of Autistic adults,” said Norm and Suzy. “We love having Matthew join us and have seen the growth in his confidence and social skills, and on the flip side, Matthew has brought joy into our café, among staff and customers. And he makes a pretty good flat white.”





Facilities: creating purpose- built, autism-friendly school environments

Aspect Central Coast School celebrated the opening of their renovated Senior College campus

In July, Aspect Central Coast School celebrated the opening of its revamped Senior College campus. The grand opening event brought together our exceptional students, dedicated families, community partners, passionate educators and supportive staff.

The refurbishment project was extensive, totalling \$1.4 million, and aimed at providing an inclusive learning environment for 36 high school students.

The renovation included complete refurbishment of the existing classrooms to incorporate autism-specific design improvements and the addition of two new classrooms to accommodate our growing student population.

A new outdoor undercover recreational area was also constructed, along with upgrades to all ancillary facilities and the carpark.

The success of this renovation project would not have been possible without the generous support of our community partners. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Waratah Education Foundation, VivCourt, CompNow, Financial Reporting Specialists (FRS), Pinoak Fund, Sargents Charity, Apex Foundation and the CommBank Staff Foundation for their invaluable contributions.

"We are very excited about the refurbishment of our Senior College at Aspect Central Coast School. With a focus on personalised learning and a nurturing community it provides a supportive environment where our students can flourish academically, develop their unique strengths and unlock their brilliant potential."

MARK RUDD
Principal

"Our new learning spaces are designed specifically for Autistic students and feature defined areas, calm spaces and sensory accommodations. Thanks to the extensive additions and renovations, we are now in a position to increase enrolment numbers moving into 2024 and beyond."

ROWENA PERRITT
Principal

Aspect South Coast School celebrates \$4m renovation

In October, Aspect South Coast School held a special event to officially open their newly renovated campus at Corrimal.

The expansion, two years in the making, has increased capacity from 24 to 42 students. This has enabled us to expand our support to Autistic students in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven region, where it is estimated that more than 3,600 people are on the autism spectrum.

The school now has an additional three classrooms, a multi-purpose hall, a sensory room and an expansive library incorporating calm spaces, tranquil colours and environmental supports. A further four classrooms have been fully renovated along with the playgrounds.

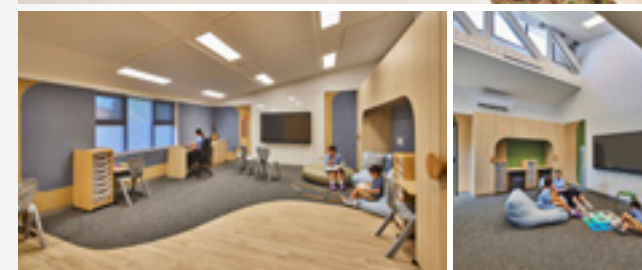


Celebrating the official opening of our newly renovated Aspect Vern Barnett School

The Aspect Vern Barnett School was first built in 1971 and was Aspect's first autism-specific school. This year, our Capital Works Master Plan enabled us to undertake the most extensive renovations to the school in its 50-year history.

The scope of works for the refurbishment included state-of-the-art classrooms, creating new landscaped and sensory playgrounds and incorporating autism-specific design improvements to support sensory requirements in the classroom. Six new classrooms were added taking the total to 15, enabling us to enrol more students. New calm, sensory and active playground spaces (indoor and outdoor) were added along with a new multipurpose space.

In Term 4, we celebrated the official opening of the newly refurbished school. The event included a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony, and a message from Mr Matt Cross, Member for Davidson. The night's highlight was having our CEO, Jacqui Borland, and former Aspect Vern Barnett school student, Max Epper, cutting the ribbon to officially open the new campus.



University of Wollongong opens new campus

In Term 3, Aspect and the University of Wollongong (UOW) opened two new purpose-built Aspect South Coast School satellite classes on UOW's Wollongong Campus.

New Kindergarten classes for 12 students opened in Term 3 this year, while a high school facility for 18 students in Years 7 to 12 will open in 2024. This is the first time we have operated satellite classes of this kind at a university in the greater Sydney region.

The high school campus will be located within the Engineering precinct of UOW while the Kindergarten classes are located near the Early Start Discovery Space. Early Start Discovery Space is the first dedicated children's museum in the world based on a university campus.

The new facilities will provide widespread benefits for our school students and their families, including access to campus facilities, student placements and internships for education students, employment opportunities and further learning pathways.



Aspect Macarthur School underwent substantial enhancements, amounting to a total investment of \$1.4 million.



Aspect Macarthur School receives a \$1.4 million upgrade

These upgrades were aimed at improving the learning environment and overall experience for both students and staff.

The primary focus of the upgrade was the refurbishment of all learning areas including autism-friendly classrooms, creating more interactive spaces conducive to learning and enhancing the overall aesthetic appeal. Additionally, a new external playground was constructed, providing our students with a safe and stimulating outdoor environment.

A significant portion of the investment was allocated to the acquisition and setup of a mobile classroom. This versatile learning space offers flexibility in accommodating varying autism-specific educational needs and facilitates the implementation of innovative teaching methods.

These upgrades represent our commitment to providing the highest standards of education and support to the Aspect Macarthur School community. By investing in modern facilities and infrastructure, it creates an enriching educational environment that fosters growth, creativity and success for all stakeholders involved.



Aspect Riverina expands into Wagga Wagga

Our Aspect Riverina School has expanded by adding a brand-new campus situated within Charles Sturt University (CSU) in Wagga Wagga.

Enrolling students from Kindergarten to Year 6, the new campus offers autism-friendly classrooms and a large playground area where students can thrive. We will also be able to offer enrolments for Year 7 in 2025, once the building and playground refurbishments have been completed.

The campus is in a beautiful bush setting within the university, enabling all staff and students access to the university facilities, including the library, café, tennis and basketball courts and swimming pool.

"The newly refurbished space at Charles Sturt University has delivered calming work spaces, which are conducive to quality teaching and learning. The new campus offers the opportunity to support local families in providing autism-specific education in their area."

AMANDA YATES
Riverina Acting Principal



Our people: Thank you...

To our amazing staff that go above and beyond to support students and participants.



Staff breakdown



Average length of service



Long service awards



25 years

2

Amanda Yates
Aspect Riverina School
Maree Slater
Aspect South Coast School

30 years

1



Lynette Miller
Aspect South East
Sydney School

For nearly 30 years, organisations looked to Engagement as the measure of organisational culture – an odd set of questions, more aligned to productivity (doing more with less) than anything to do with the complex system that is people and culture...

Diversity: one of our greatest strengths

Today, conversations around culture are maturing. There is no such thing as “perfect culture”. It is just “culture” and the magic lies in understanding our unique culture, what matters most to us and what we need from our workplace and colleagues to allow us to be our best at work.

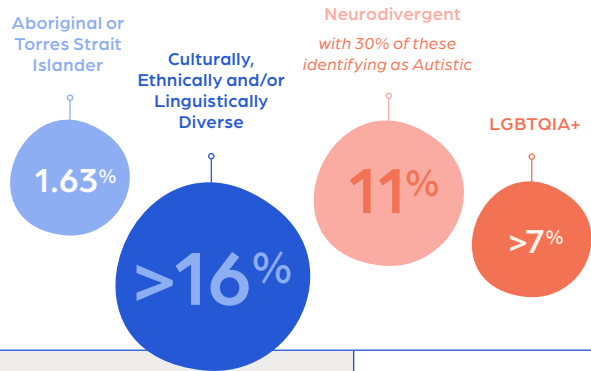
Research shows that staff in inclusive teams are more likely to stay with their employer, less likely to feel work has a negative impact on their mental health, and more likely to be effective, hard-working and creative.

Our Culture Dashboard is a new way for Aspect to better understand the nuances of our culture and the diversity of our people, so we can build a genuinely inclusive workplace where each of us feels we truly belong and are motivated to do our best work. Our first Culture Dashboard survey was launched May 2023, and close to 500 people across Aspect participated.

Results will help us to better understand the diversity of our workforce and plan initiatives to strengthen our organisational culture.

They will also inform our approach to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. We want to build a genuine sense that everyone has a place at Aspect and that everyone is valued for their unique contribution.

Demonstrating the wonderful
diversity of our people ...



Top 3 most important factors relating to identity for respondents:

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 1. Their parenting responsibilities (63% of respondents have parenting responsibilities) | 2. Their gender (84.76% identified as female, 13.62% as male and 1% as non-binary) | 3. Their caring responsibilities (43.09% of respondents have caring responsibilities) |
|--|--|---|

75%
of respondents
feel that they
belong at Aspect.



Aspect shines at Sydney Mardi Gras

2023 was pivotal for the LGBTQIA+ community, marking the 45th Sydney Mardi Gras and also welcoming Australia’s first World Pride event, setting a precedent in the Southern Hemisphere for celebrating diversity and inclusion.

This is the fifth year Aspect has been involved with Mardi Gras, demonstrating our ongoing commitment to empowering members of the Autistic LGBTQIA+ community. The theme “GATHER, DREAM, AMPLIFY” inspired our working group, made up of LGBTQIA+ and Autistic community members, to embrace the opportunity for greater visibility and education on autism’s intersection with LGBTQIA+ communities.

Through our strong messaging and our largest parade group yet, Aspect was able to show the power of Autistic LGBTQIA+ voices and the impact they can have, highlighting the importance of inclusive spaces and acceptance.

Aspect’s continued involvement in Sydney Mardi Gras demonstrates our commitment to these intersectional communities and symbolises our commitment to diversity, inclusivity and recognising every individual’s unique contributions.

Embracing cultural diversity in the workplace in ICS

Cultural diversity in the workplace is a powerful asset that can drive innovation, enhance problem-solving and create a more inclusive environment.

Insights from our Culture Dashboard highlighted that our Individual and Community Services (ICS) team has been very successful in attracting a diversified team of allied health staff in a tight market.

More than a quarter of our team has enriched their life or career with international experiences, half balance the critical role of parenting, and our age range spans from 25 years through to 55+, combining both energy as well as experience. This diversity ensures that the services we provide are not only rich in experience, but also broad in perspectives, enabling us to better meet the different and individual needs of our participants.

By embracing diversity, we not only enhance our organisational culture but also significantly uplift the communities we serve.

IMPACT

Staff in Individual Community Service (ICS)	Neurodivergent staff in ICS	Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in ICS	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse in ICS	Identify as LGBTQIA+ in ICS
330	15%	1.6%	20%	10%

Bringing optimism and resilience to Aspect:

Meet Alexandra



Known for her positivity and diligence, Alexandra brings a unique blend of optimism and resilience to Aspect.

Her journey, marked by early challenges and personal growth, demonstrates the power of understanding and embracing one’s unique attributes.

Primary school years were difficult and Alexandra faced some hurdles, including a misdiagnosis of ADHD. This led to medication and, unfortunately, teasing from other students. This experience extended into her high school years and whilst difficult, contributed to her remarkable resilience.

Alexandra’s career path initially led her to the hospitality sector, where she worked in hotel pubs before a shift in direction and a qualification in Business Administration (Medical Administration) through TAFE NSW.

It was at the age of 25 that Alexandra received a formal autism diagnosis. This milestone was the start of a long association with Aspect, including participation in research projects, promotional campaigns and conferences (locally and internationally). Alexandra joined the Aspect Think Tank in 2019 and continues to this day to be an active member.

This group, composed of Autistic individuals, plays a crucial role in advising Aspect on best practices, emphasising the importance of lived experiences in shaping our services and approaches.

Reflecting on her diagnosis, Alexandra explains, “The diagnosis itself for me has been like a huge weight has been lifted off my shoulders, and I am still learning about certain things that I do not fully understand. The one thing I would love for people to know is that having an autism diagnosis isn’t a negative thing and that all the stereotypical associations with the condition are not all true. We are all “a different brilliant” and all have our own special interests and are well versed in a wide range of topics.”

Today, Alexandra works as receptionist and office administrator at our National Office. Her contributions, particularly during World Autism Understanding Day, not only enrich our campaigns but also foster greater understanding and acceptance of autism in the broader community.

Our Patron, Life Governors and Life Members

Our Patron Mr John Doyle AM	Life Governors <i>In memory of* :</i> <i>Dr Ian Barnett</i> <i>(Life Governor since 1973)</i> <i>Larry Rawstone</i> <i>(Life Governor since 1984)</i>	Mr John Doyle AM Mr David Epper OAM Mr Adrian Ford Mr Hilton Grugeon AM Mr Gerry Harvey Ms Cheryl Hatch Mr Peter Werner
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Life Members <i>In memory of* :</i> <i>Geraldine Bryant</i> <i>(Life Member since 1996)</i> <i>Kathleen Pigram</i> <i>(Life Member since 2008)</i>	Mrs Clasina Andrews Ms Julie Anthony AM OBE Mr Mark Bowen Ms Judy Brewer AO Robert and Judy Brown Mr Henry Capra Mrs Barbara Cummins Professor Peter Dodd Mr Peter Drayton Mrs H Emanuel Mr Mark Fogarty Mr John Gerahty Ms Julie Hamblin Mr Laurie Horin Lady Sybil Joel Ms Judith Johnson Dr Peter Mayne Mr Michael McColm	Mr Malcolm McEwen Mr Tony McGrath AM Mrs Shirley McIntosh Mr Richard Owens Mr Keith Perkin Mr Robert Pesavento Mr Ostilio Pisanu Dr Gretchen Poiner Dr Jacqueline Roberts Mr Weston Ryan Mr Basil Sellers AM Mr John Shand Dr David Starte OAM Mrs Margaret Stead Mrs Andrea Werner Ms Jenny Young
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* In memory of our Life Governors and Life Members who passed away in 2023.



Paul Khoury

CHAIR OF THE BOARD

Paul Khoury, B.Sc, GD Ed, MA, GD App Finance, SF Fin, GAICD, has more than 30 years' experience in the Investment Management & Security Services industries across the US, UK and Asia-Pacific regions having held numerous senior positions at the Director, CEO and COO levels.

Paul is currently Managing Partner of Cove Partners, a consultant to the Financial Services industry specialising in business strategy, governance, and operations transformation.

Previously, he held senior roles in the areas of investment management, operations management, and actuarial consulting for several domestic and international investment managers and industry service providers. These included Link Group, State Street Corporation, Focus Investment Management, Hambros Hopkins, GIO, MIRA Consultants and IFA Australia.

Paul joined the Board in March 2018 and Chairs the Education Strategy Oversight Committee. He was elected Chair of the Board on 24th May 2023. Paul is a member-elected Director.



Karen Orvad

DEPUTY CHAIR

Karen Orvad, B.Comm, MBA (Exec), CA, GAICD, has over 25 years' experience in Risk, Internal Audit, Governance, Board Advisory and Strategic Human Resources including executive coaching, culture assessment and change management.

Karen is a former KPMG Partner and has worked with some of the worlds most recognised brands in the corporate, government, financial services and not-for-profit sectors.

Karen is the Chair of the Board of St George Community Housing (SGCH) and a member of its Audit and Risk, Safety and Sustainability and People and Culture Committees. Karen is an independent member of the NSW Treasury Audit and Risk Committee. Karen is a specialist adviser in the areas of risk culture and behaviour and in assisting organisations identify and address both the human and structural elements needed for effective governance.

She joined the Board in 2019 and is a Member of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and the People, Culture and Safety Committee. She was elected Deputy Chair in July 2021. Karen is a member-elected Director.



Marielle Latour

HONORARY TREASURER

Marielle Latour, B.Ec, Exec MBA, GAICD, is a Non-Executive Director and Business Consultant who has worked across various industries including financial services (30+ years), health services and sport. She is experienced in marketing and distribution, M&A and strategy with strong commercial acumen.

She is currently a non-executive director of CBHS Corporate Health Fund Pty Ltd and Member of the Audit and Risk Committees. Her board portfolio has included Deputy Chair of a mutual health insurer, Chair of a privately-owned pharmacy services business, a credit union, sports technology business network and a national sporting organisation.

Marielle joined the Aspect Board in November 2018 and is Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and a Member of the Governance Committee. Marielle is a member-elected Director.





Tori Haar

DIRECTOR

Tori Haar, BBehavSc(Psych), BA, DipGov, MDisSt, has over seven years’ experience in the government and not-for-profit sectors including project coordination, policy development, research administration and data analysis. She is an Autistic woman and has been active in the Autistic community since receiving her diagnosis in 2013.

From September 2016 onwards Tori has worked for the Autism CRC, of which Aspect is an Essential Participant, in a variety of roles including as secretary for the Australian Autism Research Council and developing the current version of the Sylvia Rodger Academy Future Leaders program. Prior to this, she worked in the federal public service for the Department of Social Services.

Tori received a Westpac Social Change Fellowship in 2019 to recognise and further her work around leadership and capacity building in the Autistic community and was formerly a founding member of the Aspect Advisory Council.

Tori joined the Board in December 2020 and is a member of the Governance Committee. Tori is a member-elected Director.



Paul Vevers

DIRECTOR

Paul Vevers, PSM, GAICD, BA (Hons), CQSW, Dip Management Studies, is a management consultant working in the human services area. Prior to retiring from the role, he was a Deputy Secretary at the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, with responsibility for public housing, local child protection services and some disability services.

Paul started his career working as a group parent in a Rudolph Steiner residential facility in Switzerland and then had a variety of management roles in child protection in London.

Since moving to Australia in 1999, Paul has had senior management roles in regional and metropolitan areas, focused on social housing, child protection and homelessness. Paul was awarded a Public Service Medal for services to homeless people.

Paul joined the Aspect Board in August 2018 and is a member of the People, Culture and Safety Committee. Paul is a member-elected Director.



Dr Emily Russo

DIRECTOR

Emily Russo, B.A., B.Ec. (Hons), M.I.A., Ph.D., GAICD, has over 20 years’ experience in talent management, consulting, strategy, stakeholder management and academia. She advises organisations on talent management and has a background in professional services consulting in Australia and the US with firms such as KPMG and CEO Forum Group, now part of Gartner Inc.

Emily is an Industry Fellow with the University of Queensland Business School and has research interests in the areas of talent management, diversity equity and inclusion in organisations, and neurodiversity in the workplace. She has numerous publications and has presented her research at international conferences, guest lectures, panel discussions, podcasts, and during media interviews, such as on ABC Radio National.

Emily joined the Board in March 2020, is a Member of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and chairs the People, Culture and Safety Committee. Emily is a member-elected Director.



Pam Rutledge

DIRECTOR

Pamela Rutledge AM, BA Dip Social Work, MAICD, FIPAA, has over 40 years’ experience managing and leading complex health, community services and mental health services. In her early career, Pamela worked as a Social Worker in front-line mental health service delivery, and was the Executive Officer of the Richmond Inquiry, which significantly influenced the delivery of services for people with a mental illness and those with a developmental disability.

Before joining the not-for-profit sector, Pamela had extensive experience in senior roles in the NSW government, including experience in health, housing, and ageing and disability.

Pam moved to the not-for-profit/ community-managed sector in 2009 to become CEO and Company Secretary of Richmond Fellowship of NSW and then CEO of the merged Flourish Australia (RichmondPRA Ltd), a role she retired from in 2017.

She joined the Board in 2018, is a Member of the People, Culture and Safety Committee and chairs the Governance Committee. Pamela is a member-elected Director.



Georgina Harrison

DIRECTOR

Georgina Harrison, BSc, MAICD is the former Secretary of the NSW Department of Education. A leader with over 20 years experience leading public policy reform and public institutions with a consistent focus on social policy areas including disability and education.

Georgina has experience of working at senior levels in Government across multiple jurisdictions. She began her career in the UK Civil Service where she worked on government priorities in immigration and cybercrime. She went on to work in the Prime Minister’s Delivery Unit where she worked at the heart of government, supporting delivery of major policy commitments.

In 2012, working for the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Georgina co-led the taskforce that established the NDIS. She went on to support the implementation of the scheme in NSW during her time with the Department of Family and Community Services.

Georgina joined the NSW Department of Education in 2017 and was appointed Secretary in April 2021, where she led the development of educational services for schools, championed the first disability strategy for NSW Public Schools and developed a system-wide approach to school improvement and led the response to COVID-19. Georgina is currently pursuing her passion for policy development and reform in the not-for-profit sector.

Georgina joined the Board in November 2023 as a Board-appointed Director to fill a casual vacancy and is a Member of the Education Strategy Oversight Committee.



Jenny Bridge

DIRECTOR

Jenny Bridge BEd, MComm, MTax, Exec MBA, ACA has over 20 years of operational and consulting experience working in, and consulting to, education, government, commercial and not for profit organisations.

In her role at Scyne Advisory, Jenny works across the early childhood, school, TAFE and Higher Education sectors on strategy development, operations, workforce strategy and enterprise transformation to optimise outcomes for students, parents, teachers and other stakeholders. Jenny’s work across the education sector has had a focus on student experience, wellbeing and how tertiary education institutions (TAFEs and universities) work with the education provider sector. Prior to joining Scyne Advisory (and PwC) Jenny held executive roles at Think Education Group (now known as Torrens University) and the Australian Institute of Music and various commercial roles.

Jenny joined the Aspect Board in December 2023 as a Board-appointed Director to fill a casual vacancy and is a Member of the Education Strategy Oversight Committee and the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee

Year ended 31 December 2023 An overview...

As the Treasurer, I am honoured to report on Aspect's solid financial performance for 2023.

The year unfolded against a backdrop of significant economic challenges, including heightened inflation, increased interest rates, limited price adjustments from the NDIS and ongoing uncertainty in the economy. Despite these obstacles, Aspect has demonstrated its operational efficiency and strategic resource management, culminating in a Total Comprehensive Income of \$30.24m for the year. This achievement not only reflects our organisational resilience but also our ability to strategically navigate through a complex economic landscape.

Despite the challenging external environment, Aspect has successfully broadened its educational footprint, as demonstrated by the growth in its student number, with the total number reaching 1,243. In addition, Aspect's Individual and Community Services (ICS) delivered a wide range of services, including therapy, adult community services, support coordination, assessment, and positive behaviour support. This extensive array of offerings provides choice and control to our diverse community, enabling Aspect's participants to achieve their individual program and broader life goals.

During 2023, Aspect reinforced its dedication to further elevating service quality through investments in its people, and significant capital initiatives across several sites. These efforts included the completion of upgrades to Aspect Vern Barnett School, Aspect Central Coast School, Aspect South Coast School, Aspect Hunter School and the strategic acquisition of a new site in Port Macquarie NSW for educational expansion. Additionally, Aspect invested in the enhancement of its connectivity and implemented new systems and cybersecurity measures, aiming to improve stakeholder data management and uphold its commitment to both quality and operational efficiency.

In the forthcoming years, the accumulated surplus will contribute to essential financial resources required for Aspect to execute its strategic plan, which encompasses four key areas:

1.

Education

Deliver evidence-based, high quality, highly valued autism-specific education and services for Aspect's students, participants and their families.
2.

Partnership

Build new opportunities and create greater impact through strong partnerships.
3.

Understanding

Develop community understanding about autism and work to create a more inclusive world.
4.

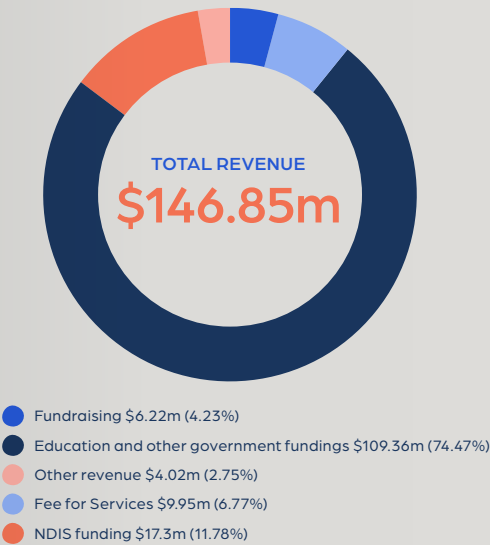
Innovation

Position Aspect for a strong future through innovation.

Revenue

Total revenue for the year was \$146.85m (Graph 1). Government funding (Education, NDIS and other Government funding) continued to be the primary source of revenue for Aspect, representing 86.25% of total revenue, which was 1.66% lower than the previous year, mainly due to the increase in other revenue sources as a portion relative to Government funding.

GRAPH 1: SOURCE OF REVENUE

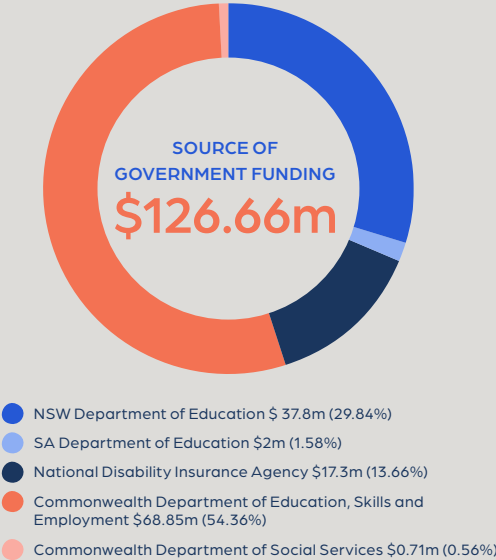


Total fees for services, including school fees, was \$9.95m (\$8.48m in 2022), which accounted for 6.77% (6.35% in 2022) of total revenue. The increase in fee for services revenue was primarily driven by the growth in Aspect's assessment services.

Gross fundraising revenue for 2023 was \$6.22m, which was an increase of \$0.52m from 2022. Aspect appreciates the unwavering support from donors during this tough period with the increased cost of living. The contributions from our donors are indispensable, as fundraising continues to be a crucial component of Aspect's revenue. This vital support enables us to deliver services that either lack government funding or have costs that exceed such funding.

Government funding experienced a substantial increase of \$9.28m, reaching a total of \$126.66m, as depicted in Graph 2. This increase can be solely attributed to the growth in student numbers at Aspect's schools and a temporary increase in per capita education funding due to the different transition arrangements implemented between the Commonwealth and State Governments. It is noted that no indexation has been made to the NDIS therapy unit price for four consecutive years.

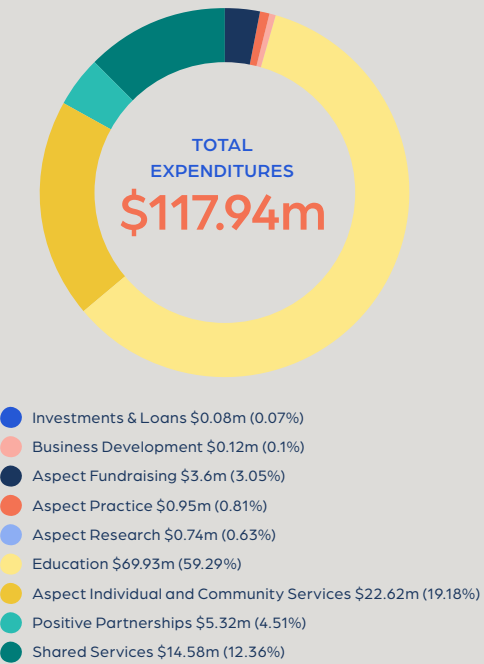
GRAPH 2: SOURCE OF GOVERNMENT FUNDING



Expenses

Total expenditures for 2023 rose by \$7.42m, reaching a total of \$117.94m, as depicted in Graph 3. This increase was primarily driven by additional staffing costs and other expenses incurred in the provision of existing and new services. Each business unit manager was responsible for overseeing their respective unit's financial position to ensure Aspect resources were being used efficiently. The Board wishes to express its appreciation for the company's effective and prudent management of this substantial cost base, which has been instrumental in sustaining the robust growth of the business.

GRAPH 3: WHERE THE MONEY WAS SPENT



Aspect Education accounted for 59.29% of total expenses by business group, followed by Aspect Individual and Community Services 19.18%. By expense type, employee expenses were \$93.48m representing 79.25% of total expenditure, which was in line with our ongoing strategy to invest in service quality and people. Other expenses, excluding salary expenses, increased by \$2.92m to \$24.47m in 2023.

Capital expenditure in 2023 was \$17.70m compared to \$16.45m in 2022, a considerable portion of which was related to the upgrade of Aspect Vern Barnett School, Aspect Central Coast School and Aspect South Coast School. The remainder was related to a range of improvements, such as facilities improvements and technology upgrades.

Assets and Reserves

Overall net assets of the organisation increased by \$30.24m to \$140.73m in 2023 from \$110.49m in 2022, placing Aspect in an improved financial position.

Aspect's Investment Reserve experienced an increase of \$1.50m, reaching \$16.49m as of 31 December 2023, from its position in December 2022. This growth reflects the active management of the portfolio in close collaboration with our investment advisers, Perpetual. The performance of the portfolio is evaluated against specific benchmarks that are in alignment with Aspect's strategic goals, liquidity needs, and risk tolerance.

This Reserve is a critical component of Aspect's financial strategy, tailored to enhance our financial durability and further secure the organisation's future. Furthermore, it provides a financial buffer that can be deployed for significant Board-approved capital investments that align with Aspect's strategic objectives or to respond to substantial business contingencies.

The cash position fluctuated throughout the year and was influenced by the timing of government funding and school fees which were invoiced in three instalments. Ending period cash and cash equivalent balances increased from \$68.36m in 2022 to \$70.91m in 2023.

As for the liabilities, the service contract liabilities of \$7.23m primarily reflected government funding revenue, which was received in advance and will be expended on programs and capital projects during 2024. The provisions balance, which totals \$14.29m, mainly comprises annual leave and long service leave liabilities accrued for Aspect staff members.

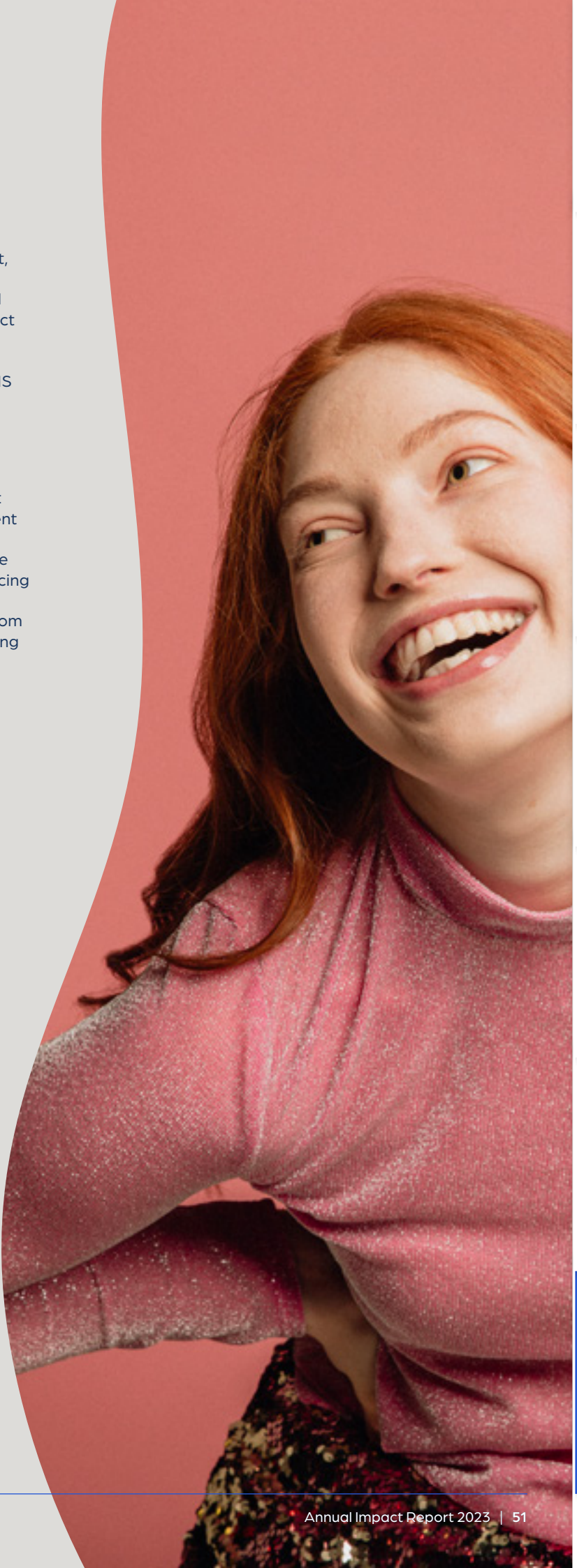
Conclusion

A robust financial foundation is crucial for Aspect, enabling it to deliver long-term, sustainable, and high-quality, highly valued services. The financial performance of 2023 has further equipped Aspect with the means to implement its strategic plan and broaden the scope and reach of its services. During this period of significant reform of the NDIS and pending changes in educational funding, Aspect's financial resilience places it in a strong position to respond.

The Board and management are committed to refining and developing tools and processes that further strengthen Aspect's financial management capabilities in an evolving and challenging operational environment. I would like to recognise the Finance team's contributions towards enhancing financial reporting processes throughout 2023. Their efforts, alongside the dedicated support from the Executive team, have been pivotal in sustaining Aspect's financial health.

In closing, I extend my deepest appreciation to my fellow Board members, with a special acknowledgment to the Finance, Audit, and Risk Committee, for their unwavering support throughout the year.

Marielle Latour
Honorary Treasurer





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