



**MAKING A  
LIFE-CHANGING  
DIFFERENCE**



**abacus**

**achieving with autism**

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## PROVIDING HOPE, JOY AND INCLUSION

At Abacus Learning Centre we never underestimate the power to make a difference and we are delighted to tell you more about our ability to provide early intervention programs for autistic children.

Through the work of Abacus, there is a unique opportunity to help some of our most at-risk children improve their school readiness and hold their own in a future economy.

Abacus has a dedicated team of experienced clinicians and a long established track record of providing autistic children with the cognitive and social-emotional skills they need to become engaged learners.

By expanding our facilities, sharing our knowledge and uniting behind shared goals - we can all help eliminate barriers, provide more inclusive environments and give autistic children a chance to succeed in school, work and life.

We invite you to consider how you might be able to contribute to our cause and in turn, help us nurture and guide the next generation.

## Message from our Chairman

### All parents want their kids to be happy, healthy and have a bright future that includes work they love.

Over the last sixteen years many members of our team have personally witnessed families go from feeling lost at the time of their child's autism diagnosis to feeling completely supported as Abacus offers them hope and understanding.

Parents often speak to the wider community about their child's therapy sessions and they recall pivotal moments with tears of joy in their eyes. Whether it be hearing their once non-verbal child say 'Mum' for the first time or watching them develop their social and developmental skills.

At Abacus we celebrate every small milestone and what feels like play to our students is actually their very own evidence-based ABA program designed specifically so they can reach their full potential.

Our families experience the life-changing benefits of tailored ABA programs in their child's crucial early years and watch them thrive beyond our service. Their success is the reason everyone in this organisation continues to give so much to ensure we can help as many autistic children as possible.

Despite all of this great work, it is surprising that Abacus doesn't receive a single cent of the funding or grants allocated to early learning facilities and up until 2018 only those who could self-fund were able to access early intervention. Many of our families made great personal and financial sacrifices because as you can imagine, services delivered on a one-to-one basis are costly to provide.

The introduction of the NDIS has provided more people with the ability to access services but it has also raised a number of challenges for our organisation including how to make our service sustainable under the price guide and ensure families receive sufficient funding to complete early intervention designed for their child.

We are hopeful of navigating these challenges and with government, corporate, philanthropic and community support we can all work together to provide the best start to life for these amazing kids.

*Melissa Violani*

**Melissa Violani**  
Chairman

# ACHIEVING WITH AUTISM

Abacus Learning Centre is the epitome of a grass roots organisation that was built for the people, by the people.

Starting with an inspired vision to provide one of Australia's first centre-based early intervention services, a group of parents and supporters made this dream a reality in 2008.

Since then, we have helped families access life-changing one-to-one therapy for their children. This is an intensive process using Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) that seems a lot like play for our students, who love Abacus.

The work we do not only impacts the student but it enables families to see a future of education, employment and community participation that they couldn't have imagined before. In fact, the majority of our students attend mainstream schools upon completion of our programs and need less supports across their lifetime.

In essence, we provide the platform for our students to achieve and there can be no better measure of success than that.

## 2008

Founding year  
Centre-based early intervention services commence in Mornington



## 2011

Abacus moves to Victoria Street, Hastings

The Hon. Greg Hunt MP undertakes a 500km Walk for Autism to help raise funds for Abacus

Inaugural Abacus family participation in the Run Melbourne fundraiser

## 2012

Name change from Mornington Peninsula Autism School Ltd to Abacus Learning Centre Ltd



### 2013

Inaugural 'Achieving with Autism'  
Gala Dinner fundraiser

### 2014

In-school ABA program commences

### 2015

The Hon. Greg Hunt MP second  
500km Walk for Autism to help  
Abacus

### 2016

Abacus moves to High  
Street site at Western Port  
Secondary College

Awarded CareNavigator  
NDIS Provider of the Year

Introduction of Educator  
Workshops

### 2017

Awarded CareNavigator  
Victorian NDIS Provider  
of the Year

Count on Abacus tutoring  
support program commences



### 2020

NDIS Quality and Safeguarding  
Audit complete

Staff registered for Board  
Certificate Behaviour Analyst  
(BCBA) Certification

### 2019

Australian Government commitment of  
\$1.2 million to construct a purpose-built  
facility

NDIS registered for Therapeutic Supports

Collaboration with the Turner Institute for  
Brain and Mental Health to secure \$2.5  
million in funding for Autism research

Victorian Government supports long-  
term lease for Abacus at Western Port  
Secondary College

### 2018

10 Year Anniversary

Partnered Interior Design Studio  
with RMIT University

Hon. Greg Hunt MP undertakes  
a third 500km Walk for Autism to  
raise funds for our centre

### 2021

NDIS registered for Early Childhood  
Supports

Finalist in the Victorian Early Years  
Awards



### 2022

Construction of purpose-built centre  
complete

New branding unveiled at seventh 'Achieving  
with Autism' Gala Dinner to better reflect  
current programs and services

### 2023

Collaboration with the Turner Institute on  
the Monash Autism & ADHD Genetics and  
Neurodevelopment (MAGNET) project

Exploring future projects with RMIT University  
to continue research into the design of learning  
environments for autistic children



## OUR MISSION



Helping autistic children connect, communicate and learn.

## OUR VISION



Striving to provide autistic children and their families with the highest quality autism services through tailored programs, community partnerships and research.



# OUR VALUES

## CREATIVE



turning new and  
imaginative  
ideas into reality

- Always exploring what's possible
- Looking to continuously improve
- Passionate and reflective

## CONNECTED



everyone  
belongs

- Caring, kind, respectful and collaborative
- Understand that together we make a difference
- Connecting to place, space and people

## PLAYFUL



play with  
purpose

- Finding things to celebrate about others
- Enjoying your work and play
- Showing positive energy and a can do attitude

## THRIVING



feeling good and  
functioning well

- Always learning
- Seeing people's strengths and appreciating difference
- Focused on wellbeing

# STRATEGIC PLAN

2024 - 2026



Abacus aims to harness the immense potential in our organisation to make a positive and widespread impact on the lives of autistic children and their families.

## Objectives

Offer our life-changing services and expertise in community settings

.....

Seek avenues to financial and organisational sustainability

.....

Increase our stakeholder engagement and community awareness

## Initiatives / Activities

- Deliver therapy programs in early learning environments
- Extend therapy beyond early learning environments
- Provide training and professional development programs to help build understanding and inclusivity

## Measures

- Increase in service offerings
- Individual therapy outcome data
- Feedback and surveys

## Success / Outcomes

- Helping more autistic children and their families find the services and supports they need
- Successful connections with educational and community organisations
- Seeing positive outcomes for autistic children and lowering their need for supports in the future
- NDIS registration for behaviour support (module 2 and module 2A)

- 
- Identify and develop opportunities for funding through donations, sponsorships and grants
  - Support our families by providing advice, workshops and information on available programs and funding
  - Represent the importance of funding early intervention to government

- Measure performance to budget
- Fundraising conversion rates
- Enrolment data

- Fundraising committee operational with board, staff and family input
- Ongoing reliable revenue streams that help sustain our core business
- Sharing our knowledge with industry and government to improve outcomes for autistic children
- Reduction in the number of families experiencing interruption to service

- 
- Continue to build on our partnerships with universities and support research programs
  - Work with similar organisations to share information and address issues that affect autistic children
  - Encourage volunteer participation and peer-connection

- Partnership outcomes
- Research findings
- Media engagement
- Participation rates

- Our clinical experts collaborating with researchers and engaging in joint projects
- Evaluating and using research findings to inform best-practice and improve services
- Becoming an influencer who speaks to issues and advocates on behalf of our families
- Increased levels of family and community engagement

# HEART FIRST LEADERSHIP

We have big dreams and great people who do their best to make them a reality.

Our board and management lead with empathy, humanity and authenticity. They understand and value the rights of people with a disability and know the importance of providing families with the opportunity to exercise choice.

Throughout the years a collective sense of purpose has provided us with the resilience to tackle challenges together.

A former Abacus parent and board member who recently retired after seven years of voluntary service said in his farewell message *“there is an intangible magic that happens at Abacus, it’s what sets them apart and always will. Abacus has changed my family’s life in ways we could never entirely express.”*

## The Board of Directors

Abacus Learning Centre Limited is a registered charity with DGR status (Deductible Gift Recipient).

Our volunteer Directors generously donate their time and expertise, working closely with our Management Team to help drive our strategic objectives.

Each Director brings a unique skillset and are ambassadors for our cause. Through their networks they create opportunities that help ensure our for-purpose organisation has both community and philanthropic support.

We are fortunate that many of our Board members have and continue to be parents of autistic children. Their insights and understanding are vital to our decision making.

The 2024 Abacus Board of Directors:

- Mrs Melissa Violani, Chairman
- Ms Jillian Wilson, Deputy Chair
- Mr Andrew Christie
- Mr Zak Critsilis

Directors are responsible for the overall governance of the centre and delegate responsibility for the operations and development of the centre to the Management Team.

## Our Management Team

The Abacus Management Team are responsible for managing operations across the organisation.

Our experienced staff include some of the most accomplished clinicians and advisors who have worked with autistic children for over 20 years.



### Rachel McLeod

Clinical Manager

Rachel has been a member of the Abacus team since 2008. She completed a Bachelor of Primary Education at Monash University in 2011 and left briefly to teach before returning to Abacus Learning Centre. She has since completed a Master of Education with a specialisation in Applied Behaviour Analysis at Monash University. After completing additional requirements, Rachel is also a Board-Certified Behaviour Analyst (BCBA).



### Jack Massey

Assistant Clinical Manager

Jack became a part of the Abacus Team in 2013 during his undergraduate studies at the University of Melbourne, working as an ABA Therapist while completing a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Psychology, and then completing his Honours. In this role, Jack oversees centre-based ABA therapy, and assists families and educators to apply best practice strategies to support learning and inclusion.



### Jody Griggstone

Centre Manager

Jody has been a member of the Abacus team since 2011. She completed a Bachelor of Social Science at RMIT University in 2010 and volunteered with Oz Child working with vulnerable children out in the community while completing her degree. Jody started her Abacus journey as an ABA therapist and moved into clinical roles such as training new therapists and case managing students before moving into operations.



## MAKING THE DREAM WORK

Our inspirational and talented staff consistently deliver best practice therapy services, making a profound impact on the lives of autistic children, their families and the wider community.

The team of over 60 staff come from a variety of backgrounds, including university students studying psychology and education, the disability sector, teaching and childcare.

It takes their big hearts to help shape young minds and we are so proud of the work they do and the difference they make.

As Abacus Learning Centre continues to grow and establish new services, we value the people who have chosen to develop their careers with us. Their loyalty, compassion and commitment to our cause are the reason for our ongoing success.

## Boundless Energy and Positivity

An applicant does not need to have special credentials or previous experience to become a good ABA therapist. ABA therapy is best learnt on the job, with clinical professionals providing training and support.

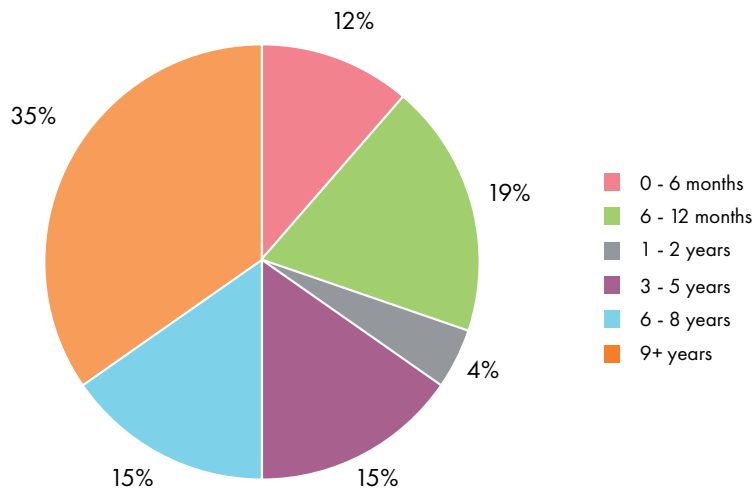
Many continue their studies whilst working for us and enjoy collaborating, sharing their ideas and learning from each other.

Our team are happy people who love a challenge and they have a wonderfully supportive culture focused on continual improvement, respectful of individual differences and the contribution of all members.

Abacus staff love coming to work, they feel valued, empowered, and a part of something special.

## LENGTH OF EMPLOYMENT

Source: Abacus Employee Feedback Survey, May 2021



"The kids laughter and energy when we learn and play together is so much fun"  
*Shanae*



"I enjoy seeing the kids from where they start through to thriving in school"  
*Daniel*



"Everyone is so welcoming at Abacus, you can be yourself and work to your strengths"  
*Sarah*



"I have learnt so much since joining the Abacus team. The training, coaching and creative approach makes it a vibrant place to work"  
*Liz*

# CAPACITY BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

The first five years of life are the most important where brain development is at a rapid pace and opportunities for learning are vast.

An Australian Government funded review of the most effective models of practice in early intervention concluded that *'Evidence-based... guidelines are particularly important in the field of autism where there has been so much debate, and where there are many heavily promoted approaches for which there is no scientific evidence, and which can even be harmful. Intensive educational and behavioural interventions such as ABA have produced positive outcomes for children with autism'*.  
(Prior Roberts 2006) [www.health.gov.au](http://www.health.gov.au)

## The Science Behind Success

The benefits of providing crucial therapy at a young age are based on extensive clinical experience and research.

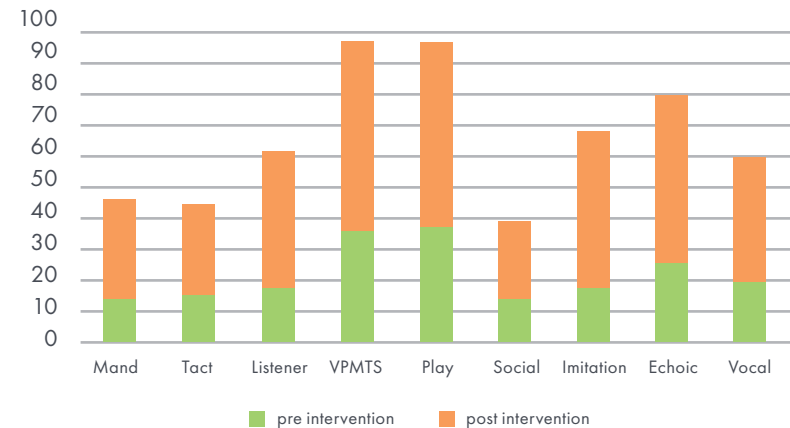
Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is a best practice, evidence informed and effective intervention for autistic children.

ABA harnesses the principles of learning theory. We implement a systematic, measurable strategy to enhance, reduce, maintain and generalise target behaviours. From speech and language to social skills, adaptive living and play skills we cover every aspect of development.

We believe that learning should be enjoyable. Through engaging and interactive play each child will be on a path to success, all while having fun!

## ABACUS STUDENT SKILL ACQUISITION

Criteria based assessment tool VB MAPP  
(Verbal Behaviour Milestones Assessment and Placement Program)





## Why Abacus ABA?

Each therapy program is designed to maximise a child's capacity to participate in their education and community with minimal ongoing support.

Our services are based on the following principles:

- **Proven results:** our approach is based on solid research and real-world outcomes
- **Family centred:** we wrap a team around our families and their input is invaluable in shaping each child's journey
- **Tailored programs:** no two children are the same, and neither are our program plans
- **Child-led:** ensuring each program is fun and delivered without restrictive practices
- **Comprehensive focus:** from communication to daily skills we cover all the bases
- **Safe environment:** therapy at Abacus is assent based and staff are trained in providing trauma informed care for all our children.

Abacus ABA encompasses various teaching techniques including;

- **Natural Environment Teaching:** used to teach new skills and generalise learned skills by delivering ABA therapy within natural activities like play and in real-life settings like kindergarten and school; and
- **Discrete Trial Training:** involves breaking down specific skills into discrete steps which are then taught in a graduated fashion.



# FAMILY CENTRED

When families find Abacus they often feel lost and in need of our help. They are always relieved to find someone who listens, often describing their first meeting with Abacus as a warm hug and a light at the end of a tunnel.

Abacus provides families with the support and resources they need to navigate challenges and provide the best possible care for their child.

We work hard to build a dedicated team around them. This includes our clinical team of Early Childhood Educators, Key Workers and Therapists who are overseen by an amazing senior clinical leadership group, including a registered BCBA practitioner.

Students regularly start with us who aren't able to communicate, but they leave Abacus happy, communicating and enjoying life.

Each student has a dedicated clinical therapy team, including:

## **Early Childhood Educator (ECE)**

Our Early Childhood Educators have a bachelor's degree or higher in a related field such as Psychology or Education. They hold current registration at ABAA as a Professional member. All our Early Childhood Educators have significant training and experience in ABA therapy and programming. They supervise all members of the individual student's team and maintain their ongoing education and professional development to continue best practice.

## **Key Worker (KW)**

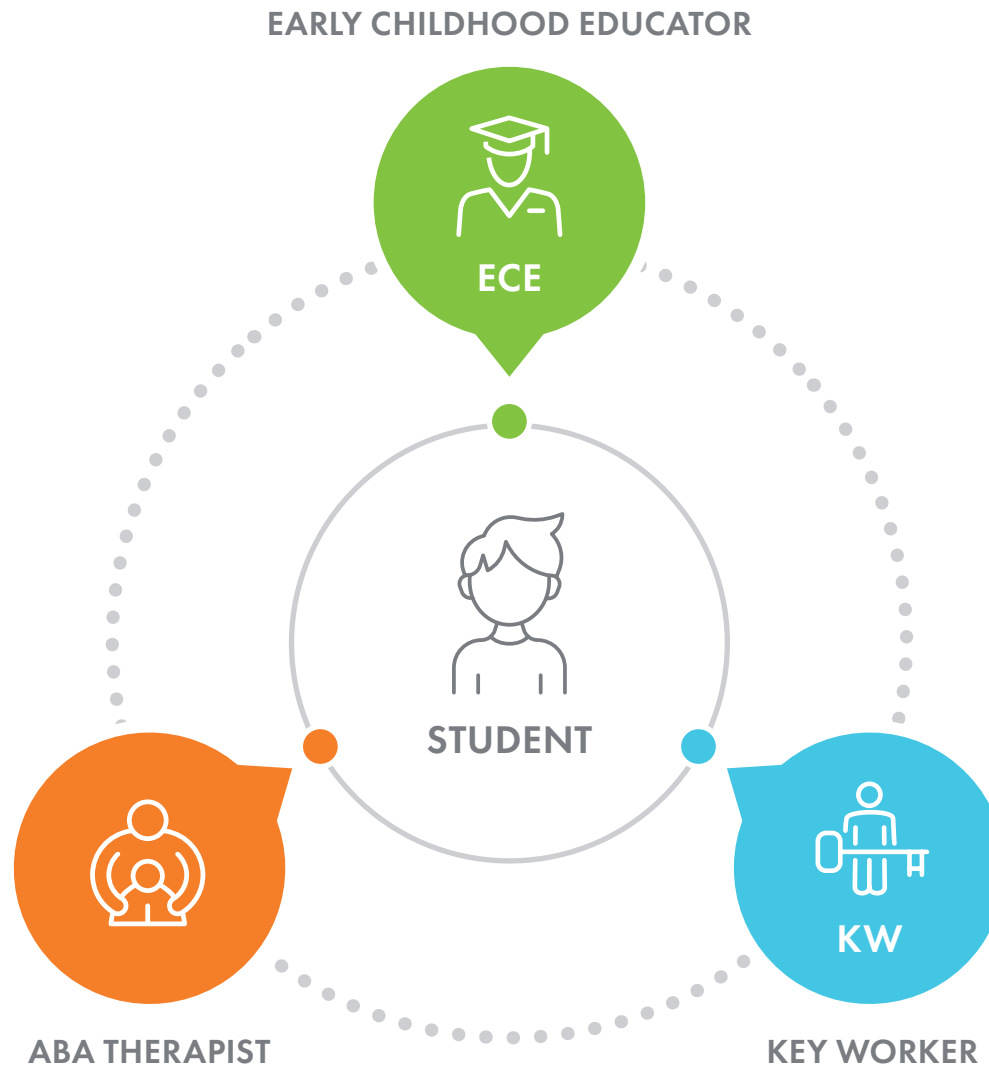
Key Workers oversee the practical clinical intervention for each student. They are considered the student's lead clinician and are the main point of contact for the student's family and therapy team. They work closely with the ECEs to plan the individual program progression, case conference outcomes, and regularly assess the overall efficacy of the service. The KW runs the Strategy Review sessions and updates the Program Support Plan which is reviewed by the ECE.

## **ABA Therapist Level 2**

One-to-one therapy provided by ABA Therapists Level 2 is delivered under the delegation and supervision of an ECE, where the ECE is satisfied that the ABA Therapist can work independently without direct supervision.

# THE THERAPY TEAM

Our experienced staff work in partnership with families to help autistic children reach their full potential.



# PLAY-BASED LEARNING

There's ABA therapy and then there is Abacus ABA where therapy is led by the child and life-changing skills are learnt.

We focus on improving their ability to effectively learn in social and educational settings. Ensuring every child has fun and is motivated is a key element of our tailored programs.

Early intervention students can attend the centre from the age of two and require anything from 14 to 30 hours per week of therapy depending on their clinical recommendations.

Creating an individualised therapy program for each child includes:

## **Initial Strategy Session**

An initial strategy session is conducted, with the student, family and their ECE and KW. Prior to meeting, other service providers are identified and medical information and reports are reviewed. At the meeting, the family identify and discuss their child's strengths and areas needing consideration, and the goals the family has for the child's immediate and long-term outcomes. The KW engages with and assesses the child's presentation while starting the Criterion-Based assessment, VB-MAPPS, to capture baseline of skill development and barriers to learning, which is documented on an online portal. Program Support Plans (PSP) and Planning documents are then written specifically tailoring to the needs and wants identified by the family. The PSP report is provided to the family.

## **1:1 Therapy**

Therapy is delivered primarily by level two therapist with supervision from an Early Childhood Educator (ECE). The ECE completes 20 hours of therapy per year. Therapy delivery may be on-site at Abacus, at the student's Kinder or School or a combination. Data is collected at every session with targets updated as clinically required.

## **Group Therapy 1:2**

Group therapy targets goals include social games and play, reciprocal language, and gross motor skills. This occurs for one hour in the middle of each day the student attends, with one therapist to two students.

## **2:1 Therapy**

Many of our programs require two therapists for a short period of a session, due to newly emerging behaviours, or a period of accelerated learning.

## **Shadow Shifts**

Shadow shifts are conducted when there is a change to the student's therapy team to ensure the therapist new to the team is trained in the student's individual needs and program support plan.

# THERAPY PROGRAMS

Individual play-based programs provide opportunities for children to actively and imaginatively engage in their learning.



# CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

At Abacus we believe in a child's ability to reach their full potential. Our dedicated team collaborates closely with families to design personalised programs that cater to their child's individuality. By embracing a strengths-based perspective, we foster an environment where each student can grow.

Parent training is a crucial part of an effective therapy program. Once a student begins, parents will receive regular training specific to their child at strategy review sessions and are invited to observe therapy or take home video footage to view.

We also provide an open and caring environment where parents can connect with other families in a similar situation.

Each Abacus therapy program has a clinical cycle, which consists of:

## **Clinical Case Conference (CCC)**

The ECE and KW oversee the student's daily therapy and therapy team. They analyse student presentations during newly emerging challenging behaviours to determine the function of the behaviour and implement proactive and reactive management strategies. They work with the team during session to progress the student's programs during periods of accelerated learning and update the student support plan planning document to feed back to the family. This ongoing supervision and intervention ensure the student's programs are progressed or modified according to their needs and ensure the student's ongoing successful participation in the therapy program.

## **Strategy Review Sessions (SRS)**

Parents and other collaborators attend Strategy Review Sessions (SRS) to observe therapy and learn strategies that are effective in aiding development of communication, concept development, tolerance etc, for their child. Families may be taught specific programs they can practice with their child across different settings.

## **Data Strategy Review Sessions (DSRS)**

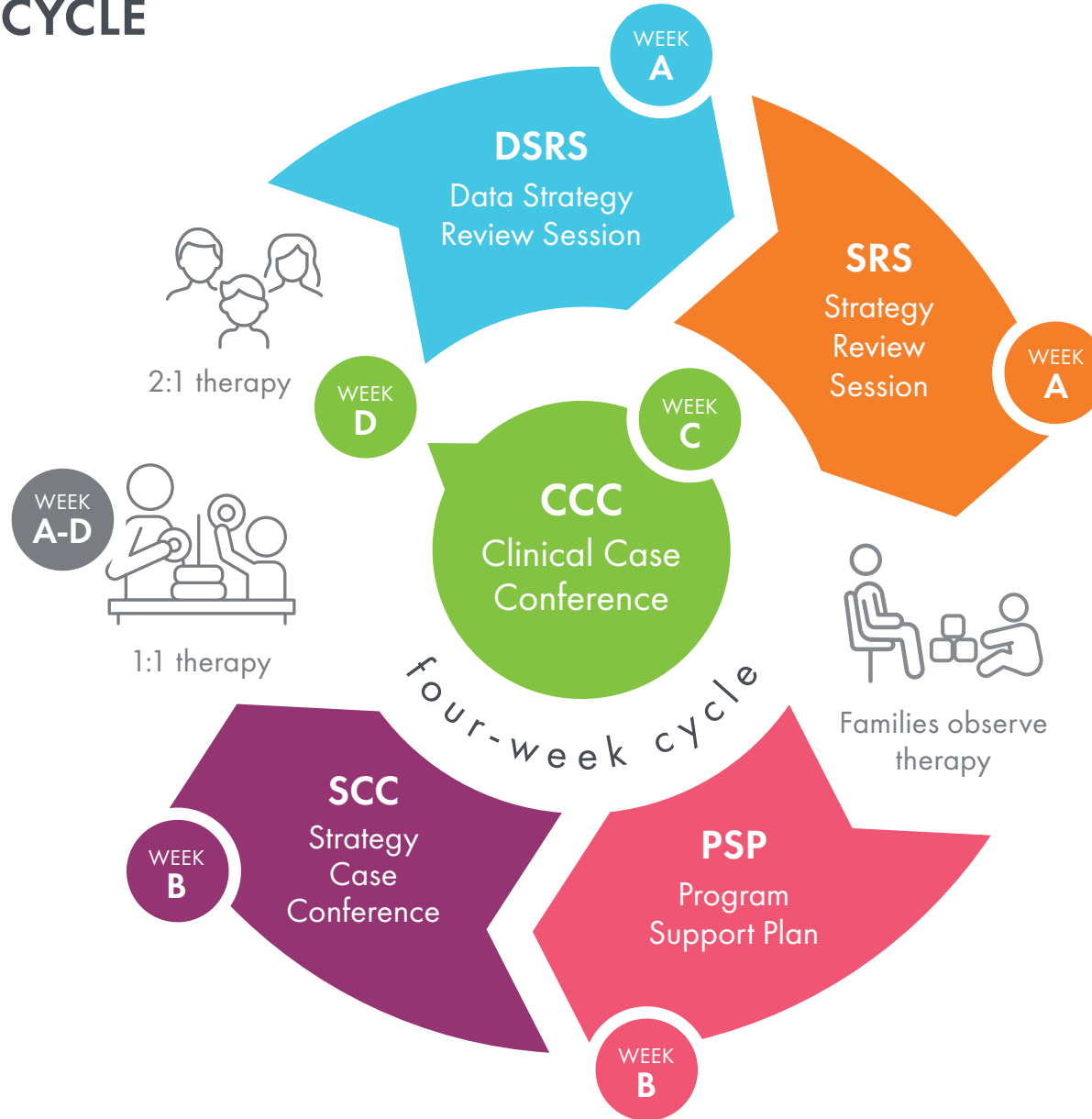
Prior to the SRS, all data is reviewed by the KW with recommendations on next steps provided to the ECE (DSRS).

## **Program Support Plan (PSP) and Strategy Case Conference (SCC)**

Program support plans are updated by the KW and then a strategy case conference (SCC) is conducted with the entire therapy team during sessions, to ensure changes to programs or student and family needs are understood.

# OUR CLINICAL CYCLE

Every month our team adapt and improve each child's program to better suit their needs.



## SEEING A MUCH BRIGHTER FUTURE

We see first-hand the benefits of early intervention in improving an autistic child's quality of life.

Our families often shed tears of joy as they watch their child learn new skills, communicate with others, reduce their behaviours of concern, socialise with their peers and gain more independence.

By sharing their stories, we hope everyone better comprehends the complexities of the autism spectrum and the importance of each and every one of their wins as they progress towards bright futures.



### Case Study 1 - Simon

Simon commenced with Abacus at three years old. He had a diagnosis of Level 3 autism. Developmentally he was at the age of 0-18 months in terms of his skills and barriers to learning. He wasn't toilet trained, he had no play skills, he was non-vocal. Simon had attended Speech Therapy and Occupational Therapy sessions but stopped because of lack of progression. After one year of ABA therapy at Abacus (15 hours per week) Simon progressed to the point that he is now talking and communicating with his family. He can take turns, engage in play, answer questions, and make statements. He is toilet trained and is becoming independent with dressing himself. We are now working to generalise his skills to his mainstream kindergarten setting and if he continues on his current learning trajectory, he will likely be unaided at kinder and then at school. Simon's success has been due to the intensive early intervention at Abacus and his mother's participation in his program. Abacus provides parents with strategies to use at home that mirror the activities we undertake. Simon's mother has participated in our parent coaching program and Simon's small team of four therapists overseen by his Key Worker and Early Childhood Educator have together achieved amazing results. At Abacus he needed to learn to learn in the areas of sustained attention, receptive language, responding to a speaker, learning to wait, and impulse control. Simon had rigid inflexible play and if anyone tried to change the play he would have a melt down where he would throw himself on the floor. He would regularly have full body melt downs. We don't see these anymore. Without Abacus Simon would've been on the pathway to attend a special school. Developmentally he has now caught up to his peers and will be attending mainstream education in the future.





## Case Study 2 - Lisa

When Lisa arrived at Abacus with a Level 2 autism diagnosis and severe anxiety she was four years old. Lisa used a dummy, she wouldn't talk very often and when she did she talked like a baby. She wasn't toilet trained and she preferred to be carried rather than walking. She was developmentally at the age of a two to three year old. She would have regular melt downs including screaming, crying, thrashing, climbing unsafe items, throwing objects and trying to abscond. By the time she went to school we weren't seeing any of these negative behaviours. After attending Abacus 15 hours per week for two years she progressed in the areas of emotional regulation, self care and social skills. The Abacus School program was very important to Lisa. In that program we mirror the mainstream school experience for two weeks prior to school starting. The program runs from our Abacus centre and we have a teacher and utilise group programs. The students line up for class, have regular snack and lunch times and are encouraged to take turns and have free play during breaks. The Abacus school program helped Lisa with her anxiety and meant that she didn't need as much support to transition to school. After just a few sessions at school she was doing so well, and Abacus had helped the teachers understand Lisa's needs that we were able to exit. Lisa is now typical of her age group in terms of her development and is unaided at a mainstream school.



## Case Study 3 - Kaid

Kaid started with Abacus in 2020 when he was three. He was at least one year behind his peers at that stage. Kaid had a diagnosis of autism and oppositional defiance disorder. He was mostly non-vocal and would engage in massive meltdowns. His family was at crisis point with Kaid showing regular physical aggression to them and his baby brother. They had tried to access playgroup but had to leave due to safety issues. He wasn't able to access three year old kinder either. The family had previously tried Occupational therapy, Speech therapy and Physiotherapy without much progress. They had already ceased these services when they found Abacus. Kaid had barriers to learning that were largely based around communication, emotional regulation, social skills and sensory sensitivities. He would slam his brother's fingers in the door, throw things and physically lash out at others. He would regularly abscond. Sometimes he would completely shut down and hide under the table without responding for long periods of time. After attending Abacus for just over a year for 15 hours per week he was able to access mainstream kinder. He left Abacus because he had progressed so well. This was due to our intensive approach as well as the family's participation in our strategy review sessions and taking the learnings to use in their home. Kaid came back to Abacus for two weeks of Abacus School to help him transition to school. He now attends a mainstream school unaided full time.

Please note names have been changed to protect privacy.



## WHERE THE MAGIC HAPPENS

Over the last 16 years, families have found their way to our centre-based service through many different paths - a referral from a child's psychologist, paediatrician, GP, NDIS support co-ordinator, online search, or word-of-mouth.

Travelling from all-over Melbourne, our families often commute long distances to access life-changing therapy for their children.

In 2022, with government and community support, we opened our new Discovery Centre and commenced renovations on our existing Foundation Centre.

We can now enrol up to 70 students in our service and hope to continue expanding our facilities.

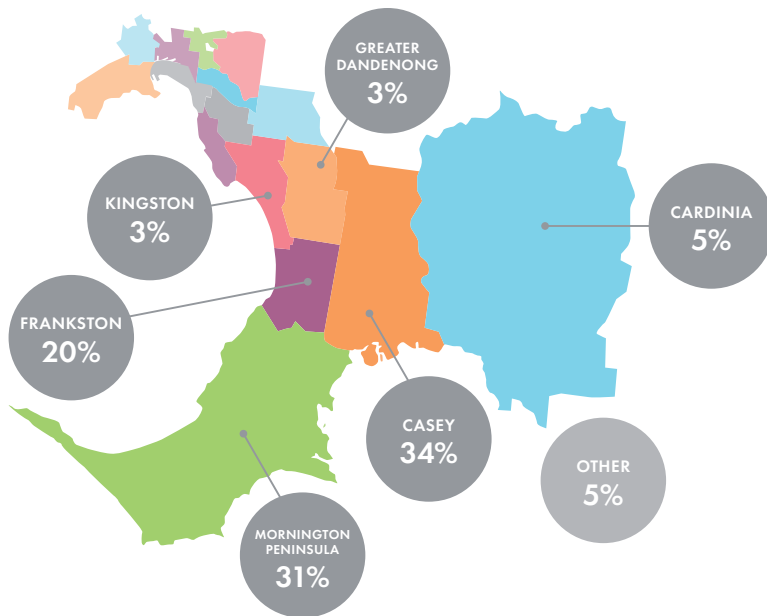
Abacus Learning Centre is located 75km south of Melbourne CBD, in Hastings on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria. Known for its unique townships, village atmosphere and a diverse local economy including tourism, agriculture, retail, manufacturing, construction and business services.

Our families come from a range of socio-economic groups and over 50% are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

All Abacus services and supports are provided in a flexible manner to ensure all cultural considerations, including ethnicity and language, are incorporated into planning and programming.

### STUDENT ENROLMENTS BY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

Source: Abacus Enrolment Data, April 2022



### Discover Our New Purpose-Built Centre

Together with funding from the Australian Government we completed construction of our new Discovery Centre in 2022.

This is no ordinary building. Abacus worked with students at RMIT University on an Interior Design Studio addressing learning environments from a non neuro-typical position.

Design considerations included managing sensory inputs from lights and sounds, ensuring easy circulation so people can move between activities as seamlessly as possible, providing disability access and organising spaces into 'high stimulus' and 'low stimulus' areas.

Our centre has many features unique for providing ABA therapy including individual therapy rooms, sensory play areas, gross motor playrooms and all of the amenities for a working education centre.



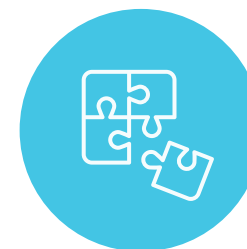
## SHARING OUR KNOWLEDGE

Our trained Abacus staff are experienced in supporting each child and their families in the crucial stages of transition to group learning environments. This support includes on-site training of teachers and aides on the student's specific learning style and effective behaviour strategies.

In-line with our current strategic plan, Abacus now provides therapy programs in early learning environments, after-hours sessions for school-age students and community training opportunities.

This expansion reflects our commitment to making a wider impact and addresses a critical gap in available therapy options.

## EARLY LEARNING CENTRES



## COMMUNITY ABA

Through the Community ABA program, we offer personalised programs that are delivered within the student's childcare or kindergarten and at Abacus Learning Centre. This hybrid model allows intensive learning within a controlled environment at our centre as well as the opportunity to generalise skills within the child's natural environment.

The primary objective is to support the student to develop the skills to thrive within their early learning community.

Abacus ABA therapists conduct the sessions at the early learning centre, with a minimum duration of one (six-hour) session per week in a one-on-one setting.

Additionally, the student will participate in a six-hour session at Abacus Learning Centre each week. Strategy review sessions involving families are held once per month onsite at Abacus and the student's educators are encouraged to attend strategy review meetings.

The Community ABA program is suitable for students up to school age. Abacus offers this program to early learning centres within a forty-five-minute radius of Hastings, Victoria.

## SCHOOLS



### COUNT ON ABACUS

The Count on Abacus program for school-age children will be changing. The key change is that in addition to the after-school sessions conducted at Abacus Learning Centre, sessions will be delivered in a one-on-one learning environment on-site at the child's school.

Abacus ABA therapists will conduct the sessions, with a minimum duration of one (two and a half-hour) session per week at school and the student will continue to participate in a one-hour session at Abacus Learning Centre one afternoon per week.

Strategy review sessions involving families will be held once per term onsite at Abacus. We also encourage the student's teacher and aide to attend strategy review meetings.

The program's content will still be unique to the individual learner and designed to focus on meeting the specific learning goals for that child. This will often involve a bottom-up approach that teaches the student the underlying skills required for learning in a busy classroom environment. This may include skills focused on communication, social, emotional and play development.

## COMMUNITY



### PARENT AND EDUCATOR TRAINING

Abacus offers tailored parent coaching to our families. In this program the Early Childhood Educator (ECE) provides individualised information to support the family's understanding of the teaching principles of ABA used in their child's program. This is an important element of supporting the student to successfully generalise skills learnt in therapy to other settings and people. Key areas that are covered include communication, emotional regulation, self-care (including toileting etc) and school transition support.

Abacus also provides Professional Development for Educators and Service Providers. The training is based on the principles of Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) and targets those wanting to learn more about working effectively, efficiently and inclusively with their autistic students.

Each Professional Development is tailored to the needs of the participating organisation whether this be for staff of childcare centres, kindergarten or schools.

# IMPROVING ACCESS FOR ALL

Fees for ABA programs, which are based on 15 to 30 hours per week of therapy, can range between \$70,000 to \$160,000 per year.

Up until 2018, only families who could self-fund were able to access therapy for their children. The introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has seen demand for autism services grow considerably over the last five years.

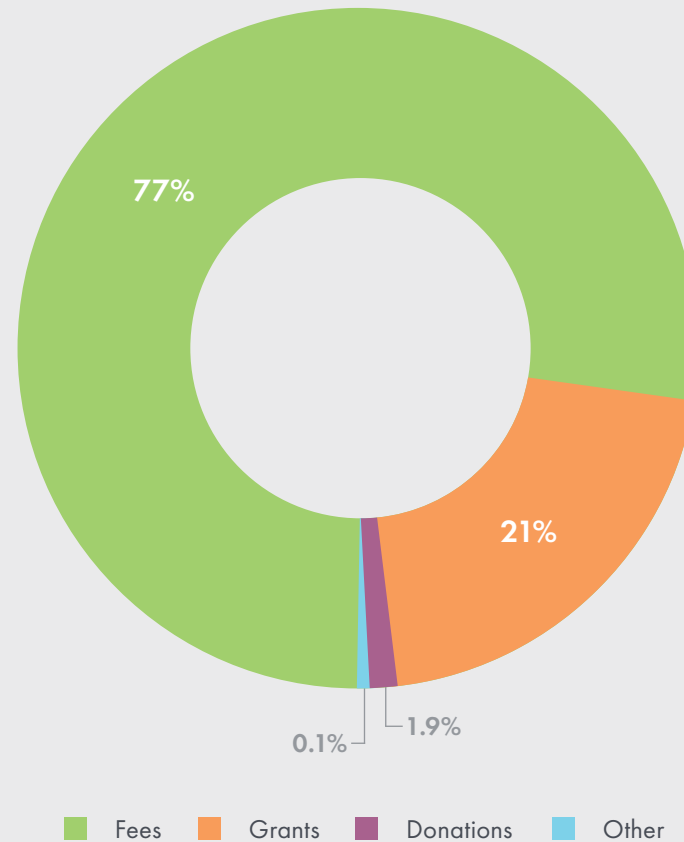
As a registered charity, we continue to rely on grants, donations and businesses providing in-kind support. This ongoing kindness is invaluable and plays an important part in ensuring we can continue our work.

## Where the Money Comes From

Total income increased by nearly 53% in 2022/2023 to \$3,548,226, reflecting growth in enrolments and higher than usual grant income from the Australian Government for construction of our purpose-built centre.

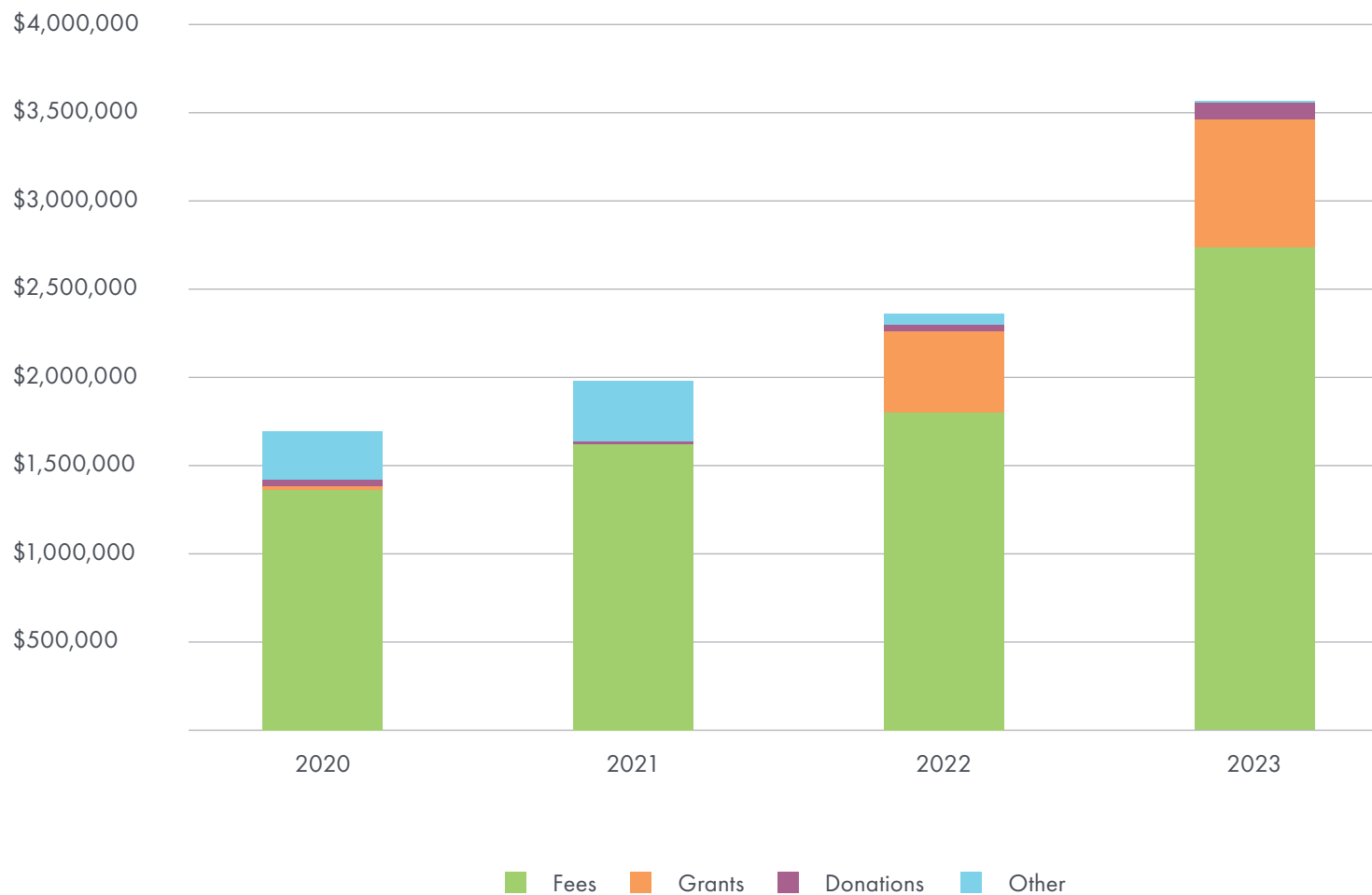
### INCOME FYE 2023

Source: Abacus Learning Centre Ltd Financial Report For the Year Ended 30 June 2023



## INCOME FYE 2020 - 2023

Source: Abacus Learning Centre Ltd Financial Reports For the Year Ended 30 June 2020 - 2023



# UNDERSTANDING THE TRUE VALUE

The high price of ABA therapy reflects the one-on-one intensity and mixture of supports required including:

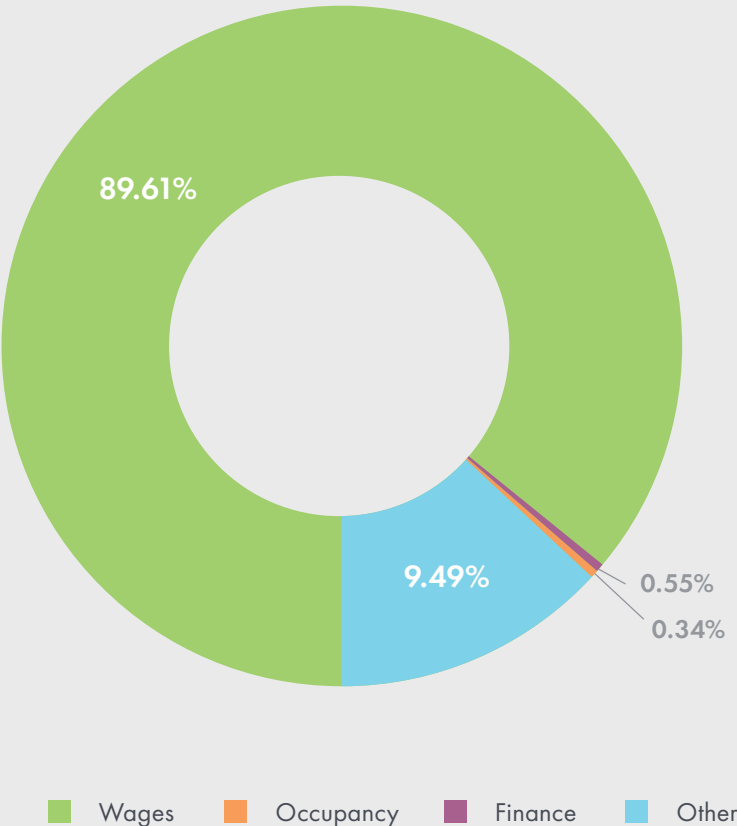
- Employing clinical staff with the experience and certifications required to oversee customised programs
- Providing extensive in-house training and development
- Analysing data, finding trends and making changes to every program
- Creating and purchasing teaching materials specific for each child
- Finding the physical space required for play-based therapy

## Where the Money Goes

Expenses to support the delivery of early intervention increased by 49% to \$2,927,721 in 2022/2023. As per previous years, nearly 90% of income was expended to wages and on-costs, reflecting the 1:1 ratio of staff required to deliver therapy.

### EXPENSES FYE 2023

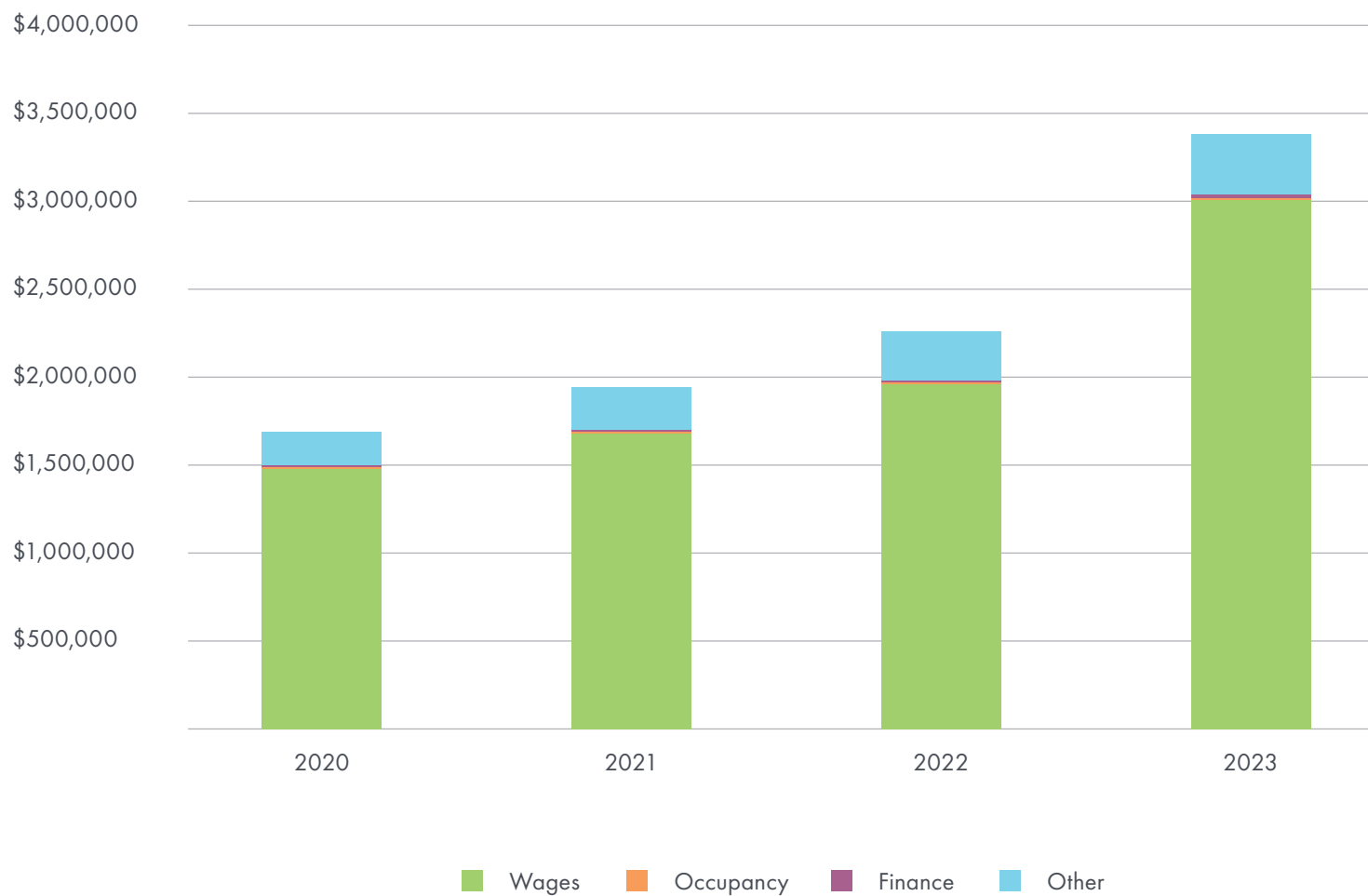
Source: Abacus Learning Centre Ltd Financial Report For the Year Ended 30 June 2023





## EXPENSES FYE 2020 - 2023

Source: Abacus Learning Centre Ltd Audited Financial Reports For the Year Ended 30 June 2020 - 2023



# BENEFITS FAR OUTWEIGH THE COST

Autism is often associated with substantial lifetime costs to an individual, their family and the community.

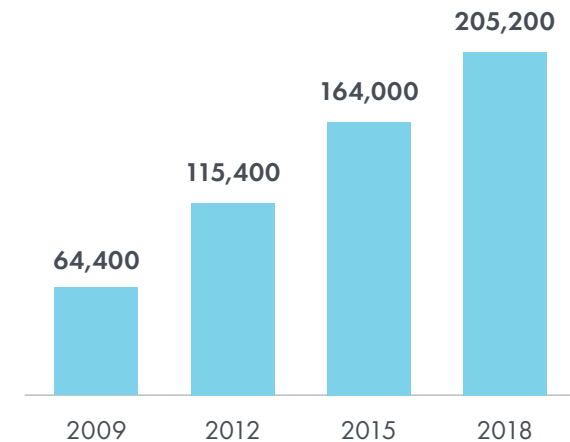
Research shows the outcomes for autistic Australians remains unnecessarily poor and a better understanding of their needs and improved funding must be achieved.

Recognising that early diagnosis and intervention are crucial in helping neurodivergent children build upon positive behaviours and reach their milestones.

Initial studies suggest that timely intervention will improve long-term outcomes in education, employment, mental health and social ability.

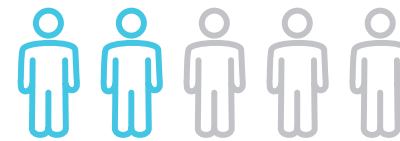
## Autism in Australia

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), the prevalence of autism is reportedly growing at a faster rate than any other disability.



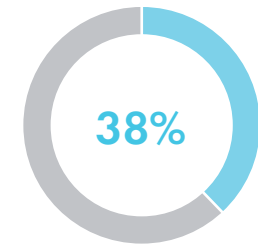
The SDAC survey highlighted that few autistic children in Australia are prepared for their education with many performing poorly at school.

Unfortunately the data also revealed that a very small proportion of autistic adults are living and working independently.



**2 in 5**

40.4% of young autistic people (5-20 years) need special tuition and 32% needed help from a counsellor or disability support person



Only 38% of autistic people (15-64 years) participate in the workforce

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) - Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Finding, 2018

## Cost Benefit Analysis of Providing Early Intervention

A number of published cost-benefit analyses demonstrate that investment in Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (EIBI) reduces a child's reliance on funded supports later in life.

The latest research commissioned by the AEIOU Foundation, shed new light on developmental gains made by children, quality of life and improved social and economic participation from both individuals as they grow and their families.



Every \$1 invested into early intervention programs equates to a **return of \$6.16** to the community



A direct cost **saving of \$4.58** to the NDIS, **approximately \$297,000** over the lifetime of each autistic child

Source: Summary of AEIOU Research data by Synergies Consulting, 2023

The other hidden cost, often overlooked, are the costs of raising an autistic child.

The median family cost is estimated to be **AUD \$34,900 per annum**, with almost 90% of the sum due to loss of income from employment.



Source: The Cost of Autism Spectrum Disorders by Chiara Horlin, Marita Falkmer, Richard Parsons, Matthew A. Albrecht, Torbjorn Falkmer, Published 5 September 2014



# LASTING AND SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

The best evidence of the effectiveness of therapy is hearing how an autistic child thrives beyond intervention.

We love listening to their inspiring stories as they continue to achieve their goals and pursue their dreams.

In addition to the benefits for the child, early intervention also provides critical support and guidance for families. We often help parents and caregivers through some of the most challenging chapters of their life.



Olivia's early intervention sessions with Abacus proved to be crucial. Abacus' approach, combining play and learning essential skills, resonated well with Olivia, making the process enjoyable and effective.

As Olivia grew older, we feared that her eligibility for services would diminish. However, Abacus once again proved their dedication and commitment by offering the Count on Abacus program. Helping her tackle more advanced school work, as well as navigate the complex emotions and friendship challenges that come with age and puberty.

Along this journey, Abacus also educated us, as parents, about ASD and how we can support and guide Olivia at home and in mainstream school. Our days are now filled with more ups than downs, and we have become a resilient and tightly knit family unit.

Often, people facing similar challenges ask me, "How did you manage it? Olivia is doing so well." My answer always boils down to one word: Abacus. Without the support and expertise of Abacus, we are certain that Olivia's path would be vastly different, with far less positive outcomes.



Paddy has just completed Year 7. He won the Principal's awards in Music, Media and Visual Arts and then won the overall medal for Year 7 Arts.

As you can imagine, Kane, Elliott and Ronnie were thrilled and so proud of all he has achieved. He loves animating, writing books and drawing and wants to be an animator when he finishes school.

They often talk about Abacus and the impact it has had on their lives. Ronnie said "we will be forever grateful and indebted."



Tane was one of the top 17 students in Year 10 to receive an academic excellence award at John Paul College for Semester 1. This required students to achieve a mark of 85% and above in four subjects. Tane in fact averaged 91.5 % across his subjects of core Math, Science, History and Geography.

As we know this would not have been possible without the early intervention Tane received and the in-school support from Abacus for so many years. Plus, not to underestimate the moral support we received from Abacus staff who worked with Tane to sustain us through when low expectations and judgement were placed on him at times in his educational journey.



Korey was nominated by his school for the Fred Hollows Humanity Award as an Ambassador to Autism. The award recognises Year 6 students who follow in Fred’s footsteps by making a positive difference in their community. It celebrates students who show compassion, integrity and kindness in their everyday lives.

Korey had taken the initiative to support a Year 3 child with autism by educating his classmates and teachers - explaining more about ASD and taking questions. This was so well received that Korey was asked to deliver his presentation to a number of classes across the school.

There were 52 nominees for the award in Victoria, and although Korey did not win, he was presented with a special certificate sent by the Fred Hollows Foundation that was presented to him at his Primary School assembly.

When the awards were being presented via live feed, his class watched and cheered when Korey’s name appeared on the screen as one of the nominees. Mum, Mel said “He was so proud; I think he felt like a winner anyway.”



Luke attended Abacus from 2014 to 2017, from the age of 20 months until his school readiness program at five and a half.

He loved his therapists, and the transformation in his communication, cognitive and social skills over this time were truly life changing for both Luke, and our family.

Today, Luke is a happy Grade 5 student at a local independent school. With the support of his school, Luke receives specialised tutoring to help develop his written english, and also extend his skills in maths, computer coding and music.

Through this tutoring program, Luke had the opportunity to write an orchestral arrangement of the song ‘Sing, Sing, Sing’. This involved writing thirteen separate instrumental parts for trumpets, clarinet, flute, violin, piano, saxophone, guitar, bass guitar and percussion.

Luke’s music teacher invited him to conduct a local production companies show orchestra while they played his arrangement. It was an incredible experience for an 11 year old!

When Luke stepped up to the podium to conduct the orchestra, his eyes lit up, and he described it as one of the best nights of his life!





## SHINING A LIGHT ON THE CHALLENGES

Autistic children already experience significant delays in diagnosis and granting access to life-changing intervention is time sensitive before they commence school.

Due to limited awareness of the benefits of early intervention and an impetus to cut costs, families often need to resort to persistent advocacy to ensure access to necessary supports.

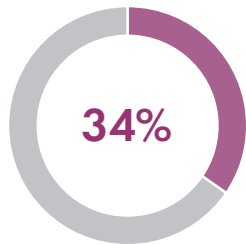
Similarly, providers face numerous challenges in delivering evidence-based therapy including:

- funding constraints
- lack of understanding about the intensity of programs
- workforce availability
- little oversight or restriction of less evidence-based or potentially harmful therapy approaches.

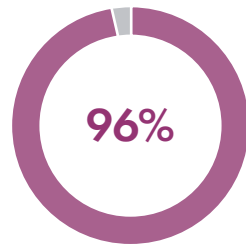
Services are desperately needed to meet the ever-growing demand and many autistic children are missing out on early intervention during the most important formative years.

## NDIS Participation

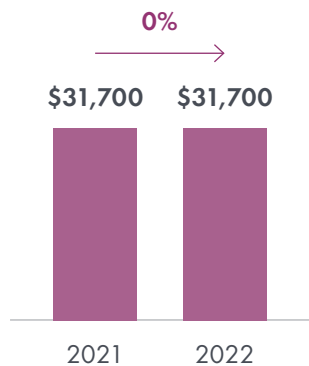
Around one in every 100 children receives a diagnosis of autism. This has led to autism being the most prominent disability category within the NDIS.



191,251 of the 554,917 active NDIS participants have a primary disability of autism



96% of parents and carers for autistic children (aged 0 to before starting school) thought the NDIS improved their child's development at their most recent plan reassessment



**\$31,700**  
the average payment for the 12 months to 30 September 2022 for a participant with autism, the same as the previous year

Source: National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) - Autism Summary: September 2022

## Funding for Autistic Children Falling Short

Over the last few years, we have noticed a worrying trend with a high number of our young students receiving much less NDIS funding for early intervention than in previous times - often not enough for even six months of therapy.

When families request a review, many find they are automatically rejected, and this leaves the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) as their only course of action.

For most families, who have spent years advocating for their children, the appeals process is overwhelming, confusing and emotionally draining. Over 50% of our families are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and wouldn't consider taking their case through the legal pathway. If families do find the energy to take the AAT path it can be 6-12 months before their case is heard.

Either way, the end result is either a pause in service for their child, which creates significant setbacks, or the child is unable to complete their individual program which has an even greater impact on their long-term outcomes and need for future supports.

The NDIS was created with the intention of ensuring that all individuals with disabilities receive access to the necessary care and services they need. It's disheartening to think that families are now finding it increasingly difficult to obtain funding for proven capacity building.

We are working hard to be a voice for our families to ensure that this mission is not compromised, from lobbying government to seeking philanthropic gifts.

# INVESTING IN THEIR FUTURE

Without access to early intervention services, the outcomes for autistic children are significantly reduced, and the financial and emotional wellbeing of families are compromised.

Recognising the shared value of best-practice therapy is vital to improving long-term outcomes and making a lasting impact that benefits the child, their family and our community.

As a well-respected and experienced provider, Abacus has the systems and processes in place to scale-up but require significant investment for new centres to be built and resourced.

We hope you will consider helping us pave the way for a future filled with promise and achievement for autistic children and their families.

## Early childhood development drives success in school and life

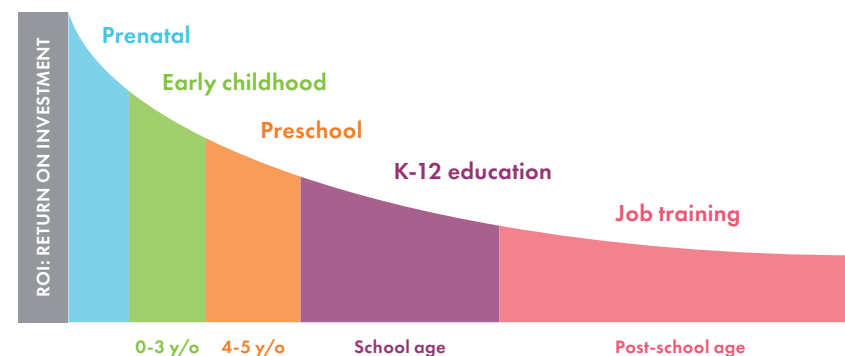
*“The highest rate of return in early childhood development comes from investing as early as possible, from birth through age five”*

James J. Heckman

James J. Heckman is the Henry Schultz Distinguished Service Professor of Economics at The University of Chicago, a Nobel Laureate in Economics and an expert in the economics of human development.

Heckman’s research shows that one of the most effective strategies for economic growth is investing in the developmental growth of at-risk young children. Short-term costs are more than offset by the immediate and long-term benefits through reduction in the need for special education and remediation, better health outcomes, reduced need for social services, lower criminal justice costs and increased self-sufficiency and productivity among families.

### ECONOMIC IMPACT OF INVESTING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING



Source: Heckman, 2012, Invest in early childhood development: Reduce deficits, strengthen the economy. Retrieved from <http://heckmanequation.org/content/resource/case-investing-disadvantaged-young-children>



## True community engagement

Through financial contributions, collaboration with non-profit organisations, and in-kind donations, business and community leaders make a meaningful, and measurable difference in the world.

Charitable giving not only provides hope and belonging for hundreds of children but you also experience the joy of being a powerful agent of change.

As a long-standing non-profit organisation we offer:

- **Social impact measurement:** clear and measurable outcomes are achieved from donations.
- **Educational events:** our team can present on topics such as 'what is Autism Spectrum Disorder', 'teaching autistic children' and 'learning more about working effectively, efficiently and inclusively with autistic people'.
- **Transparency:** accountable and regular reporting to donors. Special events and visits to our centres for major gift donors.
- **Partnership:** opportunities for sponsorship, co-branding or cause-related marketing.

We understand contributing to a charity is an important financial decision which is why we want to provide you with all the information you need to make wise giving choices that reflect your values and align with your priorities.

## Let's start the conversation



Phone our centre on 03 5979 8891



Email: [info@abacuslearning.org.au](mailto:info@abacuslearning.org.au)



Visit: [www.abacuslearning.org.au/contact-us](http://www.abacuslearning.org.au/contact-us)



# IMPORTANT INFORMATION

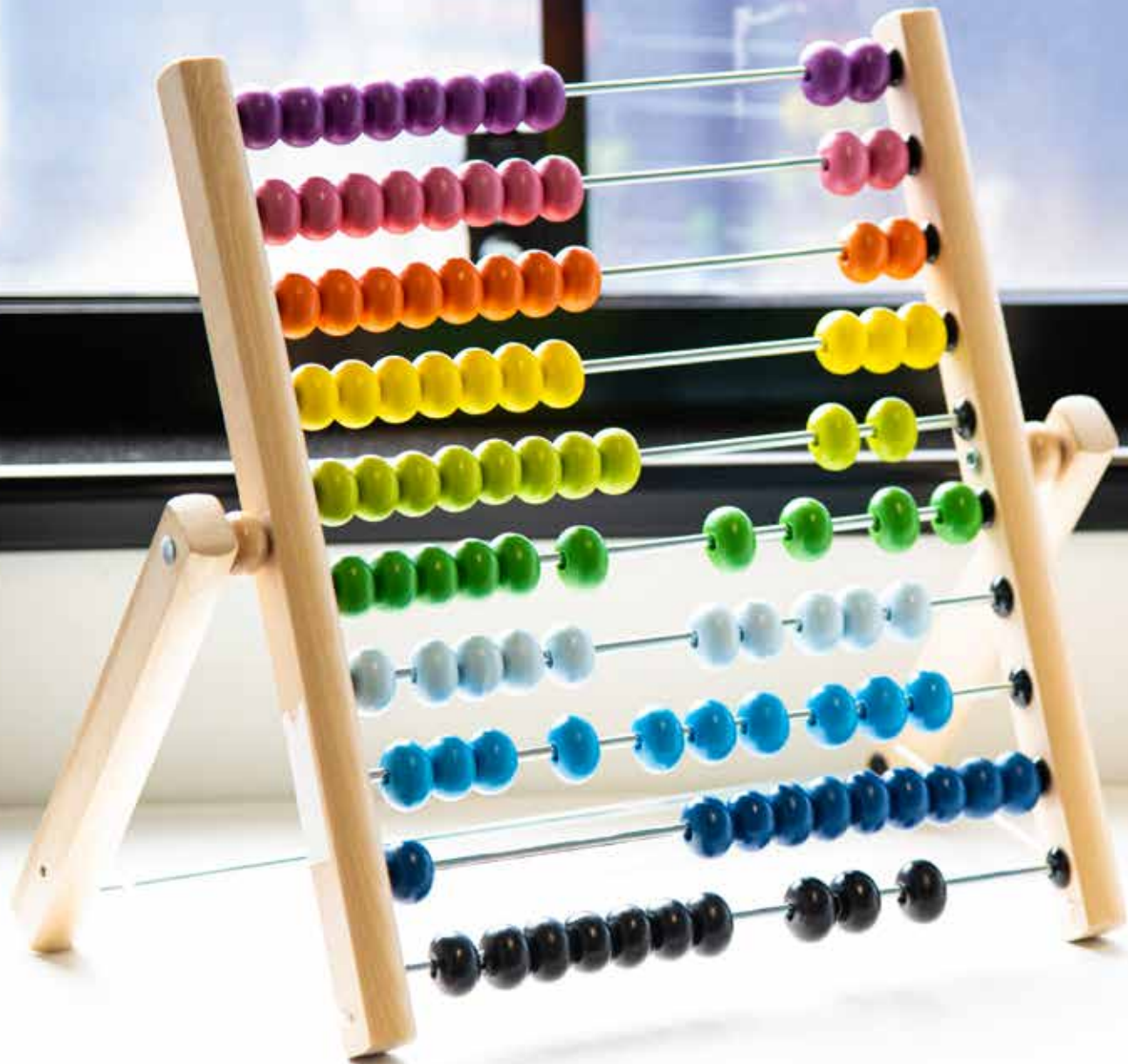
This document is dated Tuesday 13 August 2024.

Abacus Learning Centre Ltd ABN 64 122 901 704 is the entity making the invitation to invest set out in this document. This is a fundraising document and not a prospectus for the purposes of the Corporations Act 2001. Abacus Learning Centre Ltd is registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC).

You are invited to read this document and make an independent decision about investing in the work of Abacus. You should consider seeking professional advice in relation to the investment before making any decision. This document has been prepared in good faith, but has not been tailored for the circumstances of any individual investor.

No person is authorised to provide information or make any representation in connection with this offer document which is not contained in this document and any information or representation made may not be relied upon for the purposes of making a decision to invest in the work of Abacus. Neither Abacus nor any other person guarantees any specific return or outcome as a result of the work of Abacus.

Information contained in this document may change over time. Financial accounts are current as at the date stated in those accounts and are stated in Australian dollars unless otherwise specified.





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Registered NDIS Provider