

Autism: A Family Affair Campaign

Opportunity for Philanthropy



*One in every 40 children born in Victoria is autistic.
It takes specific parenting skills to successfully raise an autistic child. Most families do not have access to the right supports at the right time.*

Our goal

Mansfield Autism Statewide Services has the environment, the experience and the tools to teach families everything they need to successfully parent their autistic children, but not the funding.

By the time families access enough funding, they are often in crisis and have missed the crucial early intervention window.

Our recently built and bespoke therapeutic care farm lays the foundation for Mansfield Autism to become a Centre of Excellence in Autism, providing life changing services to autistic children and their families. We have the expertise and the facilities, and a long waitlist.

We are raising \$4 million over the next three years to complete our expansion and give over 400 families each year the support they desperately need.

By 2028, with your help, we will have completed our world-first autism therapeutic care farm and helped over a thousand more families.



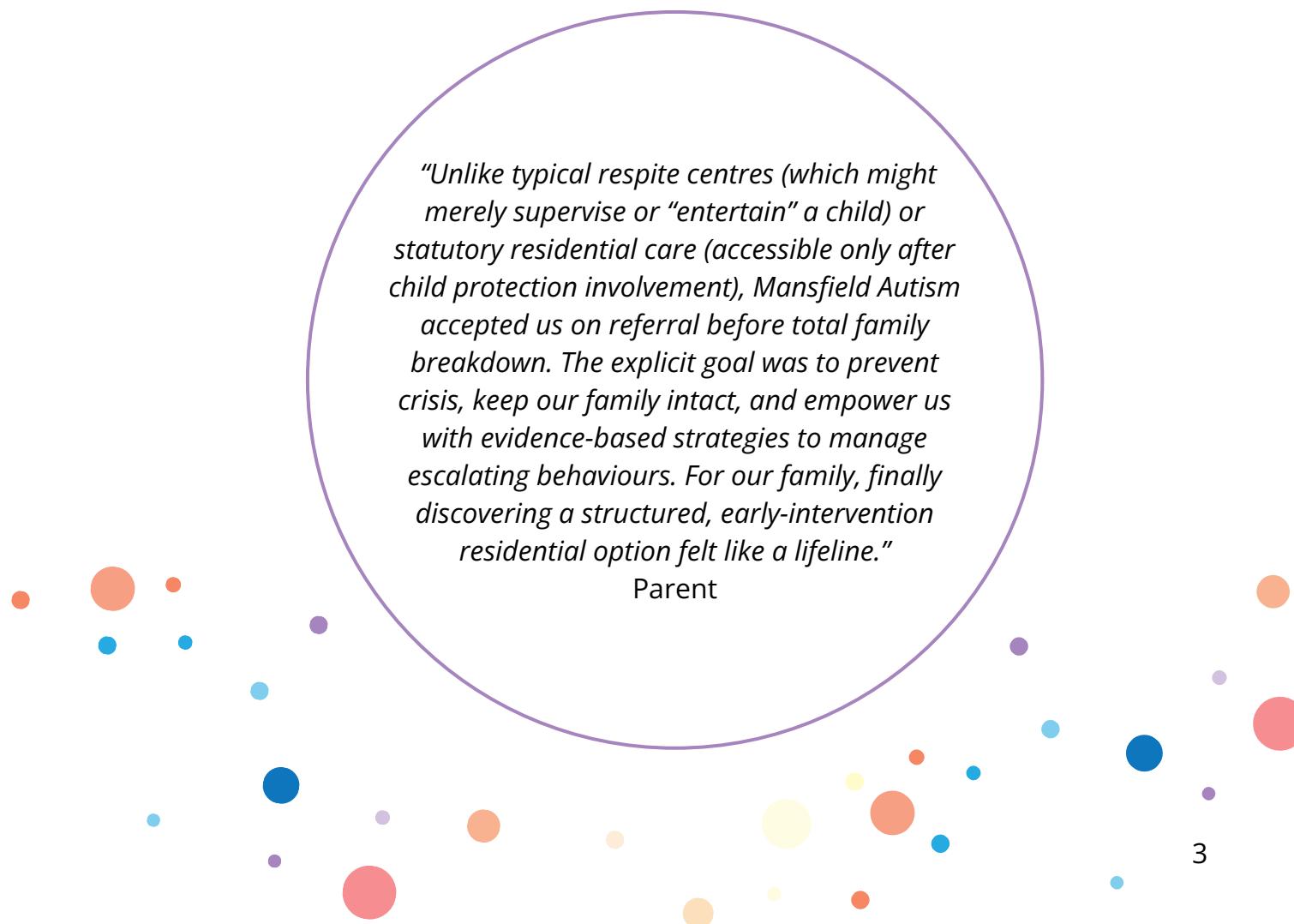
The issue

Autism affects people in different ways. All autistic people experience the challenges of being neurodivergent in a largely neurotypical world. However, autism is a spectrum. Children with debilitating severe autism and their families experience profound challenges.

Severe autism impacts the whole family; parents are often chronically stressed and siblings experience higher rates of depression and anxiety. Attendance rates for autistic children in schools are alarmingly low, with schools not able to adequately support children with challenging behaviours. Some children are even excluded from special schools. This means parents often can't work due to their full-time caring role; being an autism parent is a 24/7 commitment. Many standard respite facilities refuse children with behaviours of concern. This creates additional social isolation and exhaustion - we see lots of families who haven't had a break, even for a night, for ten years or longer.

While there is funding available through the National Disability Insurance Agency, this funding focuses on the individual with disability and does not provide sufficient funding for building capacity of families. Recent changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) are making it increasingly difficult for organisations to support the whole family unit.

NDIS funding is crisis-driven; the kind of funding that makes a life changing impact is not available until after the family has reached crisis point and is considering relinquishment or hospitalisation.



"Unlike typical respite centres (which might merely supervise or "entertain" a child) or statutory residential care (accessible only after child protection involvement), Mansfield Autism accepted us on referral before total family breakdown. The explicit goal was to prevent crisis, keep our family intact, and empower us with evidence-based strategies to manage escalating behaviours. For our family, finally discovering a structured, early-intervention residential option felt like a lifeline."

Parent

The opportunity

Mansfield Autism specialises in supporting children with severe autism and behaviours of concern. We also equip the family with the knowledge, tools and confidence to successfully parent their child, as has been the philosophy for the 50 years we have been working in this space. We have helped thousands of families to understand their child and prevented many relinquishments.

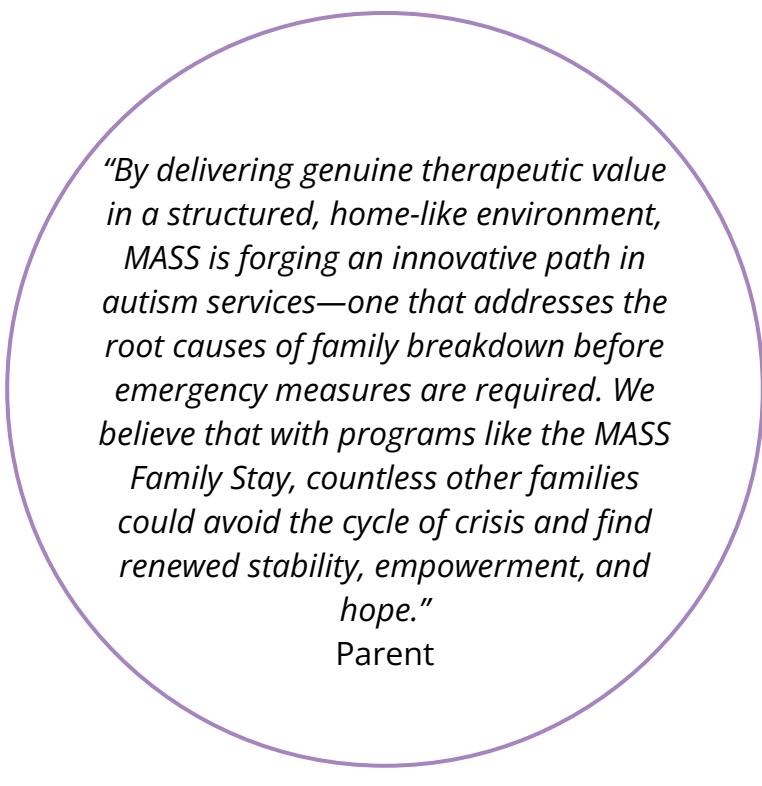
You can help make real change by putting resources in the hands of the people on the front line, working closely with autistic children and their families.

We are one of the few service providers who go to great lengths to provide support. We know what works. We have built our 100 acre therapeutic care farm to provide the calming space and structured environment to help autistic kids regulate their emotions and be open to learning new skills.

Our dream to create a therapeutic care farm has become a reality. We invested significantly to buy the land and build houses, retreat cabins and a school. Now we invite philanthropy to help us finish it.

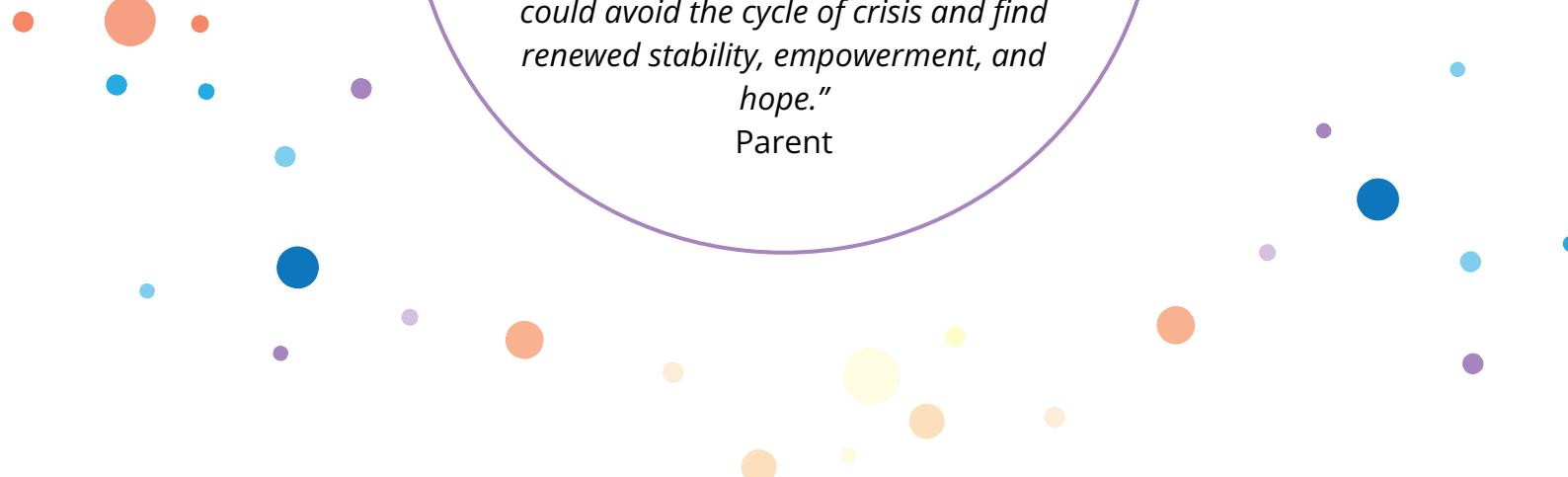
Our vision includes delivering programs to support the whole family: carer retreats, family skill building stays, sibling camps and sibling school holiday programs. We want to offer scholarships for students to attend our specialist school, develop our therapeutic horticulture 'paddock to plate' program and run an independent living skills program to help autistic young adults learn to live independently. We want to build an equine learning facility, an accessible playground, a swimming pool and a labyrinth for children to engage in and build skills.

When there is no government funding, philanthropy can fund the change we want to see for autistic children and their families.



"By delivering genuine therapeutic value in a structured, home-like environment, MASS is forging an innovative path in autism services—one that addresses the root causes of family breakdown before emergency measures are required. We believe that with programs like the MASS Family Stay, countless other families could avoid the cycle of crisis and find renewed stability, empowerment, and hope."

Parent



About us

Our mission

To empower and support autistic people to achieve their goals. We build capacity and confidence through our best practice services and supports.

Our philosophy

"The child's family is their most important teacher, and we aim to give them the understanding, the confidence and the determination necessary for the successful parenting of their child – that is our goal and nothing less is enough."

-Joan Curtis, Founder of Mansfield Autism

Our services

All our programs and services are person centred and evidence-based.



Our Allied Health team offer speech pathology and occupational therapy.

Our school provides a flexible, structured learning environment, tailored to each child's needs with a low teacher to student ratio.

Family camps are for the whole family, providing time to relax, recharge & connect with others while building social, recreational and communication skills.

Our Mansfield Autism Practitioners (MAPs) travel across Victoria, providing in-home support from an early age till 18 years, in 3-5 days blocks, up to 5 times a year.

Skill building stays offer up to 6 weeks of supported accommodation for autistic children who need a little help to develop important life skills.

Local Programs supports autistic people in Mansfield and surrounding areas with outreach, respite and school holiday programs.

Our impact

Our service is unique due our willingness to support children with the most complex behaviours, and our commitment to supporting the whole family.

Providing parents with the right tools at the right time helps them to successfully raise their child. This prevents families from reaching crisis points and makes them less likely to consider relinquishment. Crisis care takes up much of the available statewide accommodation intended for respite. Families who understand autism strategies can live a more normal life; the children can attend school, the family can attend social gatherings and the parents can work if they choose to.

How you can help

Supporting Mansfield Autism Statewide Service means more than just a donation - it means investing in the future of hundreds of autistic children and their families.

We invite you to partner with us to deliver life changing supports. Your generosity will have a lasting impact, helping us to create a world where every autistic child has equal opportunity to lead the life they want to live.

Donate today and join our transformative journey. You might have a special area of interest or leave it up to us to invest funds where it is needed the most.

Contact Philanthropy Manager Penny Reiners for a conversation today:

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"A few months ago, I was able to visit MASS and inspect the place for its planned expansion. CEO Simone Reeves showed me how the new facility would transform their ability to support people with autism. They described to me how some children with autism who are completely non-verbal can come alive when they're with animals, and how some children who struggle with attention span can become completely focused when working in the veggie garden"

Helen Haines, Independent Federal Member for
Indi Parliamentary speech

Appendix



Summary

Capital items

Animal assisted therapy infrastructure \$250,000
Sensory playground \$250,000
Swimming pool \$120,000
Finish house yards \$42,000
Farm garden \$36,000
Ngurrak prehistoric gardens \$150,000
Therapeutic labyrinth \$60,000

Total capital items = \$908,000

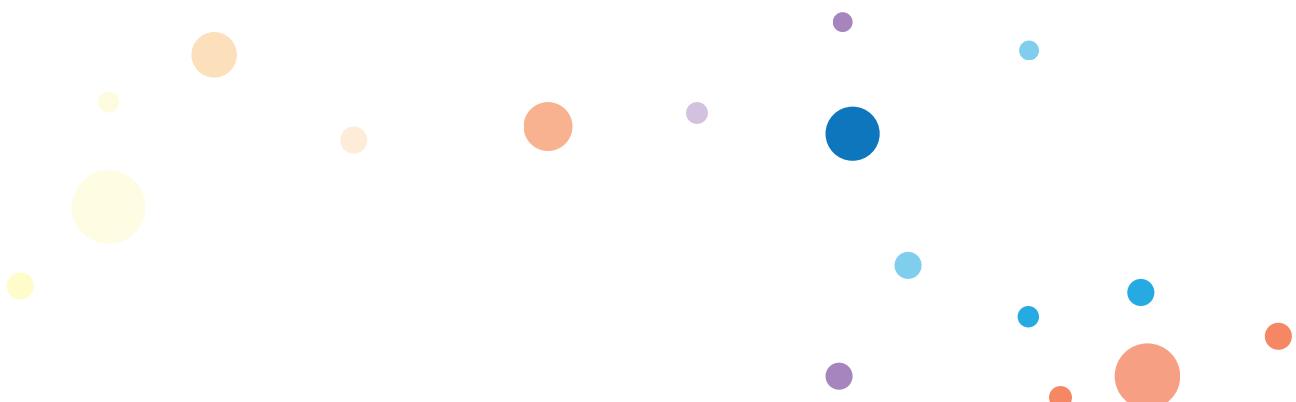
Programs

Family intensive training \$42,000 p.a.
Scholarships for students: \$70,000 p.a.
Study scholarships for staff: \$45,000 p.a.
Autism carer retreats \$120,000 p.a.
Life skills program \$150,000 p.a.
Traveling autism practitioner top-up \$300,000 p.a.
Sibling camps \$90,000 p.a.
Sibling school holiday program \$24,000 p.a.
Emergency fund \$50,000 p.a.
Equine assisted therapy \$120,000 establishment year
Therapeutic horticulture program \$100,000 p.a.

Annual programs = \$1,111,000

Total over three years = \$2,973,000

Overall total = \$4,001,000



Capital items

Capital items

Animal assisted therapy \$250,000

Animal-assisted therapy is based on building a bond with an animal through interaction and play. It helps children learn to recognise and respond to animal needs.

- Miniature Galloway cows trained in providing animal assisted therapy \$35,000
- Miniature goats and miniature donkeys \$20,000
- Fencing for paddocks and troughs \$45,000
- Completing the fenced undercover arena to offer equine-assisted learning \$150,000

Sensory playground \$250,000

Create a sensory playground and splash park for the children who come for school, family camps and skill building stays. The playground will support motor development and communication skills, be inclusive and keep children safe. We already have a level site to support rubber flooring, shade and the adventure play equipment and splash park.

Swimming pool \$120,000

Autistic children love being in water. It is a calming sensory experience that also promotes coordination and motor skills. We would love to install a safe, accessible, solar heated pool for children to enjoy now and long into the future.

House yards \$42,000

We have three houses that are used for skill building stays and respite. We do not have enough funds to complete the yards; we hope to install soft artificial grass, sensory walls and a small amount of play equipment.

Farm garden \$36,000

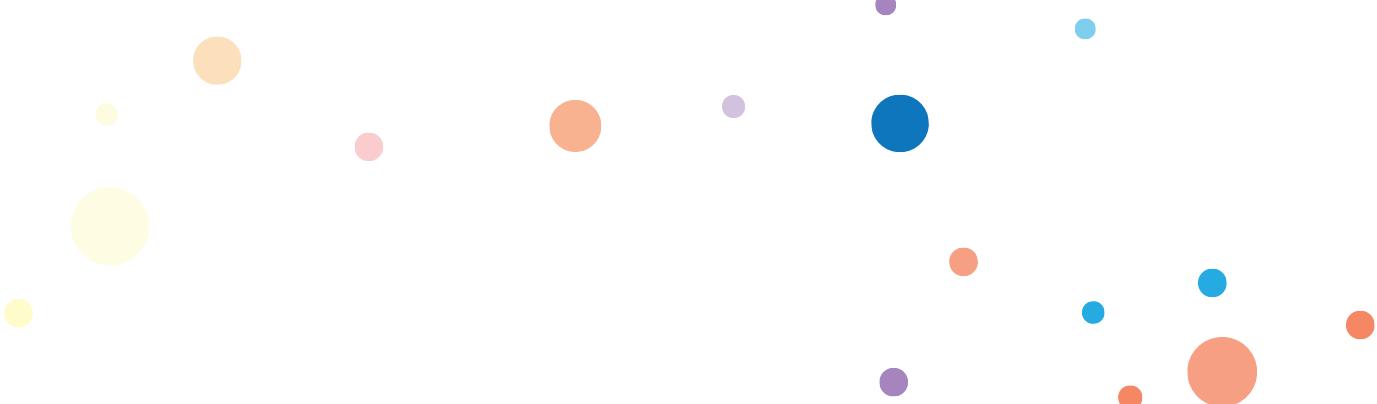
The Farm Garden is a key part of the experiential learning provided by the therapeutic care farm, supporting autistic children to participate in garden activities and watch their vegetables, plants and flowers grow. Students will help build and maintain the garden and chickens, and host a regular café and market stall where they will sell produce to the local community and gain valuable skills.

Prehistoric garden \$150,000

Ngurrak Prehistoric Gardens is a unique botanical project, led by former Mansfield Autism student Callum Gunn, that will collect, preserve and showcase ancient botanical wonders. Once complete, the nine acre Ngurrak Prehistoric Gardens will showcase a large collection of rare and ancient Gondwana era flora, many of which are critically endangered and some which have never before been planted in Australia. The Garden is being planted in stages. Once finished, it will include paths through shady forested areas, a natural creek, wildlife rich billabongs and wetlands, stunning hilltop views and relaxing grasslands. The cost includes plants, earthworks, interactive signage and furnishings.

Therapeutic labyrinth \$60,000

Labyrinth walking is an ancient practice designed to help us slow down, contemplate, and meditate. A therapeutic labyrinth on the farm would be made of all different materials to create a sensory experience including touch, smell, sight and sounds, and allow the child or parent to find some peace at the centre of it.



Programs

Family intensive training \$42,000 per annum

Best practice early intervention is based on family-centred and strengths-based practice. Mansfield Autism has designed an intensive parent training model that delivers tailored education for parents, while their child attends a skill building stay in our purpose-built house. It is delivered to one family at a time. Parents and the child come to Mansfield Autism's therapeutic care farm together, for three days and two nights, and participate in an intensive training program. Intensive training and hands on practice can rapidly build the capacity of the family and support them to implement strategies.

This program will deliver intensive training with proven outcomes to 12 families per year.

Student scholarships \$70,000 per annum

Our small specialist school delivers autism specific education to students aged 5 to 18 years. We develop skills to strengthen a student's sense of connection and belonging, providing our students with a safe space to be themselves. Many families can't afford our school fees of \$5,000 per year.

A scholarship fund will allow us to offer free education to 14 students.

Staff scholarships \$45,000 per annum

Mansfield Autism is committed to supporting staff to further their understanding of autism and other related skills. Study scholarships allow us to invest in the skills and qualifications of our staff, which will create more career opportunities and help retain an excellent rural workforce. This in turn will increase our capacity to support more autistic children and their families, and reduce our waitlist.

Autism Carer Retreats - \$120,000 per annum

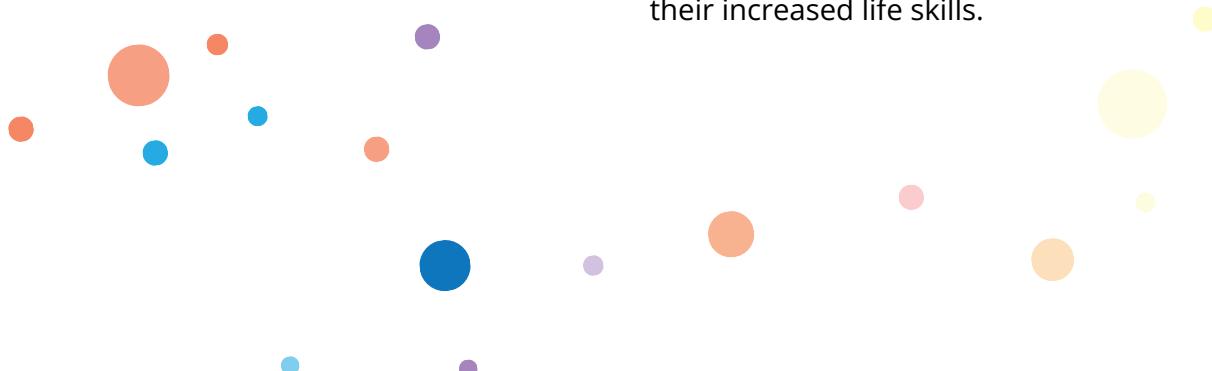
Autism Carer Retreats offer respite to unpaid carers of children with autism, with a particular focus on carers who are most in need of respite. Research shows that carers of autistic children are found to experience higher levels of stress when compared to carers of children with other disabilities. Carer fatigue and burn-out can have significant consequences including carer depression, anxiety, health problems and in some cases, relinquishment of the child. Having the opportunity to rest and recharge can make a huge difference for carers. Our Carer Retreats offer just that; three nights' accommodation in our brand-new cabins on our purpose-built 100 acre facility in the beautiful high country, meals and a range of activities and information sessions tailored to meet their interests.

With funding, we can run four retreats per year, supporting a total of 60 carers.

Life Skills program - \$150,000 per annum

Only 11% of autistic young adults move out of their family home. Our Life Skills Program helps young adults to develop the skills they need to move towards independent living. This eight week, live in program teaches a range of skills including negotiating house rules, grocery shopping and cooking, safety, budgeting, relationships and employment readiness including volunteering and work experience. Each program is run for four young adults who each have their own bedroom and share a living space and kitchen. It is designed to feel similar to a share house.

Each year we can run three programs for a total of 12 young adults who will be empowered to live with greater autonomy and confidence due to their increased life skills.



Travelling Autism Practitioner top-up \$300,000 per annum

Travelling Autism Practitioners stay in or near the family home for up to five days, providing individualised and relevant ideas and strategies that fit in with the family routine. They demonstrate hands-on modelling of strategies and coach the family in implementing the strategies. This model builds capacity of the family, is best practice and proven to be successful.

The NDIS provides funding for the development of a behaviour support plan and to train support staff in the implementation of the plan, but does not provide sufficient funding for autism practitioners to implement the plan in a hands-on way.

With philanthropic funding we could provide crucial hands-on top-up support to 10-20 families per year.

Sibling camps - \$90,000 per annum

Siblings of autistic children rarely get the opportunity to have a fun holiday. We will offer siblings from across Victoria spots in three day, two night camps held in retreat cabins or glamping tents. The camps will have a fun program of activities and the siblings will get a break from their carer role and a chance to meet other siblings. Trained autism support workers will offer 24/7 support.

With funding we can run sibling camps during every school holiday, for 60 siblings per year.

Emergency fund \$50,000 per annum

We do everything we can to prevent families from reaching crisis, but can't always prevent it. We are often the last resort for families. An emergency fund would allow us the flexibility to respond and offer emergency respite or other supports to families at times of crisis.

Sibling school holiday program - \$24,000 per annum

Holidays can be difficult for siblings as the autistic child is home full time. We would love to run a school holiday program for siblings. This will involve a day program full of activities they don't usually get to do, such as hiking, visiting the splash park or the maze, riding bikes, riding horses, baking, bushcraft, and more. They would get to spend time with other siblings of autistic children and take a break from their sibling carer role.

With funding we can run a holiday program for up to 10 local siblings each term.

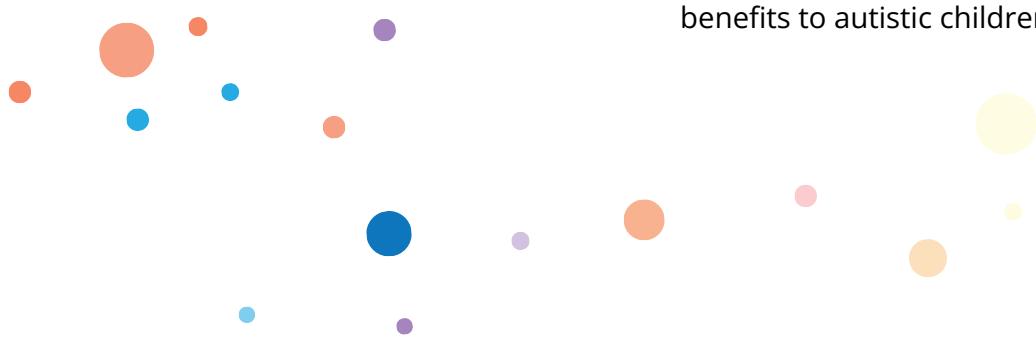
Equine assisted therapy - \$120,000 establishment year only

Equine assisted therapy is a form of therapy that uses horses to promote physical and mental health. Autistic children are offered safe experiences with horses to develop emotional regulation skills, build trust and relationships, improve communication skills and improve overall well-being. Once the program is up and running, sessions will be funded through the NDIS and will be financially sustainable long into the future. To develop it we will recruit a project officer to research the best way to achieve outcomes, shape the program and get it up and running.

After 12 months we will have an equine assisted learning program that is financially sustainable.

Therapeutic horticulture program - \$100,000 per annum

Therapeutic horticulture uses plants, gardens and garden related activities to promote health and wellbeing. Once established, a therapeutic horticulture program will be funded through the NDIS and be financially sustainable. \$100,000 will enable us to employ a project officer and develop a horticulture program that delivers therapeutic benefits to autistic children and young adults.



Thank you

Contact us

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