



LearningforLife
AUTISM CENTRE INC


IMPACT REPORT

2024/25



CONTENTS

<u>About The Learning for Life Autism Centre</u>	1
<u>Our Impact</u>	2
<u>Message from Our Co-Chair</u>	3
<u>Message from Our CEO</u>	4
<u>A National Moment for Change</u>	5
<u>Our Impact Made Possible by Our Community</u>	6
<u>Our Impact in Numbers</u>	7
<u>Where Your Support Goes</u>	8
<u>The Difference You Make</u>	9
<u>When I Grow Up</u>	11
<u>With Gratitude to Our Village</u>	12
<u>Looking Ahead</u>	14



ABOUT THE LEARNING FOR LIFE AUTISM CENTRE

OUR VISION

A world where all autistic and other neurodivergent people can thrive and live the life they choose supported by informed communities and inclusive environments.

OUR PURPOSE

We exist to provide high-quality, evidence-based services and support for autistic and other neurodivergent children and their families regardless of financial circumstances. Working alongside families, educators, and communities, we help create environments where children feel included, confident, and supported in the places they live, learn, and play.

OUR MISSION

We deliver evidence-based, child-focused services that build skills, confidence, and meaningful inclusion for autistic and other neurodivergent children. Our work spans early intervention, school and community support, educator training, and family collaboration. Using data-informed strategies underpinned by best-practice behavioural science, we combine direct support with research, advocacy, and community education to improve outcomes for children and the wider systems that support them. We are committed to doing all we can to ensure cost is not a barrier to accessing our services and to building a future where every child has the support they need to grow, learn, and belong.

OUR VALUES

Trust We value the individual

Respect We foster relationships

Equity We create opportunity

Joy We celebrate learning

Kindness We care



OUR IMPACT

The Learning for Life Autism Centre exists to empower autistic and other neurodivergent children and their families by delivering evidence-based, individualised, and inclusive services that promote lifelong learning, community participation, and personal wellbeing.

Through expanding our geographic footprint, strengthening our workforce, embedding inclusive practices into schools and kindergartens, and leading sector research and training, we aim to build a future where high-quality early intervention, educational inclusion, and ongoing support are universally accessible and sustainably delivered.

Our work drives immediate improvements in developmental outcomes, educational participation, and community inclusion for children and young people, while also transforming the broader systems they live within - education, health, disability, and family support services.

By scaling our service reach, diversifying our funding streams, building sector leadership in evidence and advocacy, and strengthening community partnerships, we will create a measurable, sustainable impact that uplifts individuals, families, and systems - ensuring that every child we work with, regardless of background or location, has the opportunity to thrive.



MESSAGE FROM OUR CO-CHAIR

MARY MUIRHEAD OAM, CO-FOUNDER & CO-CHAIR

As we emerge from celebrating our 20th anniversary year, I've found myself reflecting not just on how far we've come - but why we began.

Twenty years ago, The Learning for Life Autism Centre began as a 'bold idea' around a dining table with six people determined to change what was possible for children with Autism. We believed that every child should have the opportunity to learn their way, to communicate their way, to participate fully in their world and to feel a place of belonging in that world. That belief still drives everything we do today. What we built together wasn't just a service - it was a community, a philosophy, a Village.

I'm immensely proud of the organisation we've become. Under Nicci's leadership, and with a renewed Board, we are poised for thoughtful growth, reaching more families, strengthening inclusion in schools, and leading sector change with compassion and purpose.

To every child, parent, staff member, board member, volunteer, donor, and supporter who has walked this journey with us: thank you. You are the reason we continue to grow, learn, and change lives.

**With heartfelt gratitude,
Mary**



MESSAGE FROM OUR CEO

NICCI GODSMAN, CEO

Joining The Learning for Life Autism Centre (L4Life) during its 20th year has been both a privilege and a responsibility. I stepped into a role shaped by two decades of impact – and into an organisation ready for its next chapter.

I've been inspired by the clarity of purpose that runs through L4Life. There's a genuine understanding here that when children receive the right support, and families are surrounded by the right people, everything changes.

This past year, we've continued to show what's possible when families are supported and donors are part of the story. Philanthropy helped us do more than meet day-to-day needs it meant families weren't left in limbo while waiting for NDIS decisions. It meant we could expand our services for children with complex needs. And it meant we could guide families more holistically through the challenges of diagnosis, funding, and change, ensuring no child was turned away because of cost.

We also focused on strengthening our foundations. With new leadership roles in philanthropy and clinical services, improved internal systems, and early-stage planning for future initiatives, we've put in place the people, processes, and partnerships that will carry us into the next phase of growth. That includes preparing for the expansion of Inclusion Works® into schools and early learning settings in 2025–26.

The changes ahead are exciting, but what makes me most hopeful is what's already here: a dedicated team, an engaged community, and families who trust us with what matters most.

To our families, staff, volunteers, donors, and supporters:
thank you for being part of what comes next.

**Warm regards,
Nicci**





A NATIONAL MOMENT FOR CHANGE

In January 2025, the Australian Government released its first National Autism Strategy, a seven-year plan to improve the lives of autistic Australians. The strategy calls for a future where “all autistic people are supported and empowered to thrive” across four key outcome areas:

- Social inclusion
- Economic participation
- Diagnosis, services and support
- Health and mental health

This national momentum aligns powerfully with what we’ve always known at Learning for Life: autistic children deserve support that adapts to them – not the other way around.

Each year, 4.3% of Australian children are identified as autistic. Many of these children need additional learning support – yet nearly 46% say they’re not getting enough. Inclusion must be more than access – it must be acceptance, understanding, and practical tools to thrive.

Our Strategic Response

Our strategic plan developed in March 2025 responds directly to this national context by:

- Building regional service hubs to ensure accessible, tailored support.
- Growing our neurodiversity-affirming workforce to meet increasing demand.
- Expanding Inclusion Works in schools and launching a dedicated kindergarten stream to support autistic children early.
- Leading sector training and advocacy to shift public understanding – and make inclusion the norm, not the exception.

This is how we’re taking Australia’s National Autism Strategy from vision to action – ensuring autistic children and families receive not just support but understanding and belonging.

National Snapshot: Autism in Australia (abs.gov.au)

- 1 in 40 Australians are autistic – an increase from previous estimates of 1 in 70
 - There were 290,900 Autistic Australians in 2022. This is 1.1% of the population – up from 0.8% in 2018
 - 84% of Autistic people needed support with at least one everyday activity.
 - 45.1% had completed year 12
 - Nearly half of Australians report having limited understanding of autism
- 

OUR IMPACT MADE POSSIBLE BY OUR COMMUNITY

Our programs are shaped by a core belief: support should fit the child – not the other way around.

We work with families from early childhood through to adolescence, offering flexible, individualised support that grows with each child's needs and strengths. Our focus isn't just on developmental milestones – it's on helping children build confidence, communication, and a sense of belonging in their everyday lives.

Here's how we made that happen in 2024–25:

Early Intervention This year, we consolidated our early intervention services to better meet the changing needs of families. Our play-based, home-centred approach helps children build communication, social, and learning skills in environments that feel safe and familiar.

School-Age Support For children and teens navigating the school years, we provide one-on-one support that promotes learning, participation, and independence at school, at home, and in the community.

Positive Behaviour Support Our behaviour practitioners work with children and families to understand and respond to behaviour in ways that are respectful, strengths-based, and focused on long-term wellbeing.

Family Support At L4Life, support for families isn't a standalone service – it's woven into everything we do. Every staff member plays a role in offering guidance, advice, and advocacy, especially during times of transition or change.



OUR IMPACT IN NUMBERS



Hours of Early
Intervention support



Children received a
L4Life service



Families received coaching
and guidance



Children in our Early
Intervention Program



Students requiring specific
support within school



Educational settings where
L4Life services delivered.



Melbourne suburbs L4Life
services delivered



Children turned away
due to financial barriers*

*Thanks to the generosity of our donors and supporters (see pages 12-13), every child who came to us for support received it. No family was turned away due to financial barriers.



WHERE YOUR SUPPORT GOES

Positive Behaviour Supports

In 2024–25, more of our team became accredited as Specialist Behaviour Support Practitioners – strengthening our ability to support children with complex needs through personalised, evidence-based strategies.

Positive Behaviour Support isn't just about managing behaviour. It's about understanding what children are communicating, building trust, and helping them express their needs in safe, respectful ways. With a growing team and expanded capacity, we're better equipped than ever to help each child thrive – in their own way, and on their own terms.

Social Skills

This year, we responded to family demand by expanding our social skills programs. In addition to the successful Secret Agent Society (SAS) program for 8–12 year olds, we developed a new stream for younger children aged 6–9, offering tailored, developmentally appropriate support.

Both programs help children:

- **Recognise and express emotions**
- **Build and maintain friendships**
- **Cope with anxiety, making mistakes, and bullying**
- **Set boundaries and ask for help.**

We focus on building authentic relationships, supporting each child's communication style, and helping them navigate friendships and challenges with confidence. Because every child deserves to be accepted for who they are – not asked to change to fit in.

Inclusion Works

Inclusion Works is our year-long professional development program that embeds inclusive practices across classrooms and leadership teams. Created by our psychologists, educators, and behaviour specialists, it combines year-long coaching, tools, and evaluation to equip teachers to create classrooms where all students – especially those with autism and learning differences - can belong.

Too many children are still excluded by systems not designed for them. Teachers want to do better, but they are stretched thin, and one-off workshops don't lead to lasting change. Inclusion Works fills this gap with practical, sustained support that transforms school culture from inside out.

In 2024–25, philanthropic support enabled us to explore ways to expand Inclusion Works into more schools and early learning centres, laying the groundwork for a scalable, evidence-based model of inclusive education across Victoria.

THE DIFFERENCE YOU MAKE

At three and a half, Leo was a bright and curious toddler. His parents, Emily and Josh, noticed he was happiest playing on his own, often completely absorbed in simple activities. At playgroup or with his cousins, he didn't seem interested in joining in, and he rarely responded when they called his name. Leo was a gentle little boy but not especially affectionate - he didn't resist cuddles, but he never reached out for them, either. They told themselves he was just taking his time - every child develops differently, right?

One afternoon, Melissa, the manager at Leo's childcare, asked Emily for a quick chat. She gently shared that Leo wasn't using many words and often became distressed by changes – like a new staff member or when outdoor play was cancelled. Melissa explained these behaviours might indicate developmental differences. She suggested they see their doctor or specialist for advice.

Following Melissa's recommendation, Emily and Josh booked an appointment with a paediatrician. After a thorough assessment, the paediatrician agreed there were signs that needed closer attention - and handed them a brochure for L4Life, strongly encouraging them to get in touch.

"When the word 'autism' was first mentioned, I felt my stomach drop," Emily recalls. "We didn't really understand what autism meant - it was unfamiliar and, honestly, a bit confronting."

From the very first meeting with the team at L4Life, Emily and Josh felt seen and supported. "It helped us feel a little less lost, and a little more hopeful," said Emily. "They didn't just see the challenges – they saw Leo. They believed in him, and they believed in us." Like every parent, Emily just wanted to know that her child would be okay. "The most relieving and reassuring part was knowing we wouldn't be doing this alone."



“L4Life gave us hope and reassurance — showing us that therapy isn't about conformity, but about understanding our child's unique strengths and challenges, and learning how to support him through them. They looked beyond the behaviours to see what was driving them, always approaching him in the way that suited him best. We've seen him grow more comfortable in himself - and little by little his sneaky, happy personality is shining through. ”

Bastian*, L4Life parent

“Not every family can bridge the gap between when support is needed and when funding is approved — yet early intervention is most effective when it starts without delay.

“L4Life subsidised our program until funding was approved. That kind of support makes you feel like someone has your back and it gave us the space to focus on the moments that really matter. ”

Alice*, L4Life parent

*Details and names have been changed for privacy purposes.



WHEN I GROW UP: CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF IMPACT

Our 20th anniversary year culminated in *When I Grow Up* – a sold-out comedy gala at Melbourne’s iconic Palais Theatre.

Produced by Working Dog and hosted by our patron and co-founder Tom Gleisner, the theatre was packed with nearly 3,000 people from across our Village for a night of joy, laughter, and community spirit. We’re especially grateful to the comedic talents of Kitty Flanagan, Andy Lee, Celia Pacquola, Sam Pang and musician Katie Weston, who all donated their time to support our work.

The funds raised on the night were vital to our ongoing work – and the evening itself was a joyful celebration of everything we’ve built together over two decades: a shared journey of inclusion, growth, and lasting impact.

Special thanks to our event sponsors: Inner East Community Finance, Learning Republic and Lucas Dental Care, and to the young L4Life alumni who shared their dreams on the night: Hugo, Charlie, Omar, Clemmie, and Lachie.

"Tom and I were beyond thrilled with When I Grow Up. L4L is blessed to have Working Dog and friends in the Village for putting on this special event for our 20 year anniversary. The reality of this special night went beyond our dreams. We were inspired by the kids from L4Life who over 20 years have grown up in our Village. So grateful to our talented guests who brought more than their humour/joy and professionalism to the iconic Palais Theatre they brought their kindness, authenticity, and compassion - you could feel the love in the room. Nearly 3000 people felt the magic in our purpose and keeping L4Life going into the decades to come."

Mary Muirhead OAM, L4Life Co-Chair



WITH GRATITUDE TO OUR VILLAGE

At L4Life, everything we do is made possible by the generosity and belief of so many. To the committed individuals who give annually or through our regular giving program; the generous organisations, trusts and foundations, and philanthropic partners who believe in our mission – we thank you.

To everyone who supports our events, spreads the word, shares our values, and believes in our vision – you are all part of our 'Village'. It's your shared commitment that helps us deliver evidence-based, child-focused services that build skills, confidence, and meaningful inclusion for autistic and neurodivergent children.

We are unable to list every individual or organisation that supports us, please know how grateful we are to each and every one of you. However, we would like to acknowledge the following:

Trusts and Foundations

- Anonymous (2)
- 5Point Foundation
- The Baker Foundation
- A and C Cross Foundation
- The Brian M Davis Charitable Foundation
- Ducas Paul Foundation
- Equity Trustees
- GivingForce Foundation
- The Grace & Emilio Foundation
- H and L Hecht Trust
- Igniting Change Foundation
- The Laby Foundation
- The John & Betty Laidlaw Legacy
- Matsarol Foundation Pty Ltd
- Lesley McMullin Foundation
- Mutual Trust Pty Ltd
- The Samuel Nissen Foundation
- The Sharman Foundation
- Phil Taylor Foundation
- Wemac Endowment - Perpetual Trustees

Organisations

- Bega Group
- Gembridge
- Inner East Community Finance Ltd (Bendigo Bank)
- Learning Republic
- Lucas Dental Care
- Pallet Logistics Pty Ltd
- Pitcher Partners Advisors Proprietary Limited
- Pressroom Philanthropy
- Spectrumcare Solutions
- Wilson Pateras
- Working Dog



THANK YOU

Individuals

- Anonymous (8)
- Morena Buffon and Santo Cilauro
- Poonam Charan
- Melanie Cook and Family
- Janet Creaner
- Christine and Francois Darcas
- Naomi Dent
- Barbara Dungavell
- Georgie Dwyer
- Jennie Gale
- Natalie Gibbs
- David Gillard
- Phil Harrington
- Dr Matthew Harvey
- Ann Marie and Robert Herten
- Katrina Holmes à Court
- Danielle Jones-Resnick
- Greg LaManna
- Melanie and Ben Larkey
- Esther Lee
- Karen Lee and James Wong
- Jacki Macleish
- Therese and Danny McCoppin
- Mary Muirhead OAM and Tom Gleisner AO
- Mark Naughton
- Adriana Pesavento and Sam Pang
- Sofie Piessens
- Nathaniel Pizmony
- Greg and Lee Ridder
- Roslyn Rogers
- Pam Roy
- Dr Amanda Sampson and Dr Lyndon Hale
- Evelyn and Tom Snow
- Lyn and David Sowersby
- Kylie Streeter
- Helga Svendsen
- The Willink Family
- James Wood

Bendigo Bank members with our *When I Grow Up* performers Tom Gleisner, Kitty Flanagan, Celia Pacquola, Sam Pang, Andy Lee, and Katie Weston

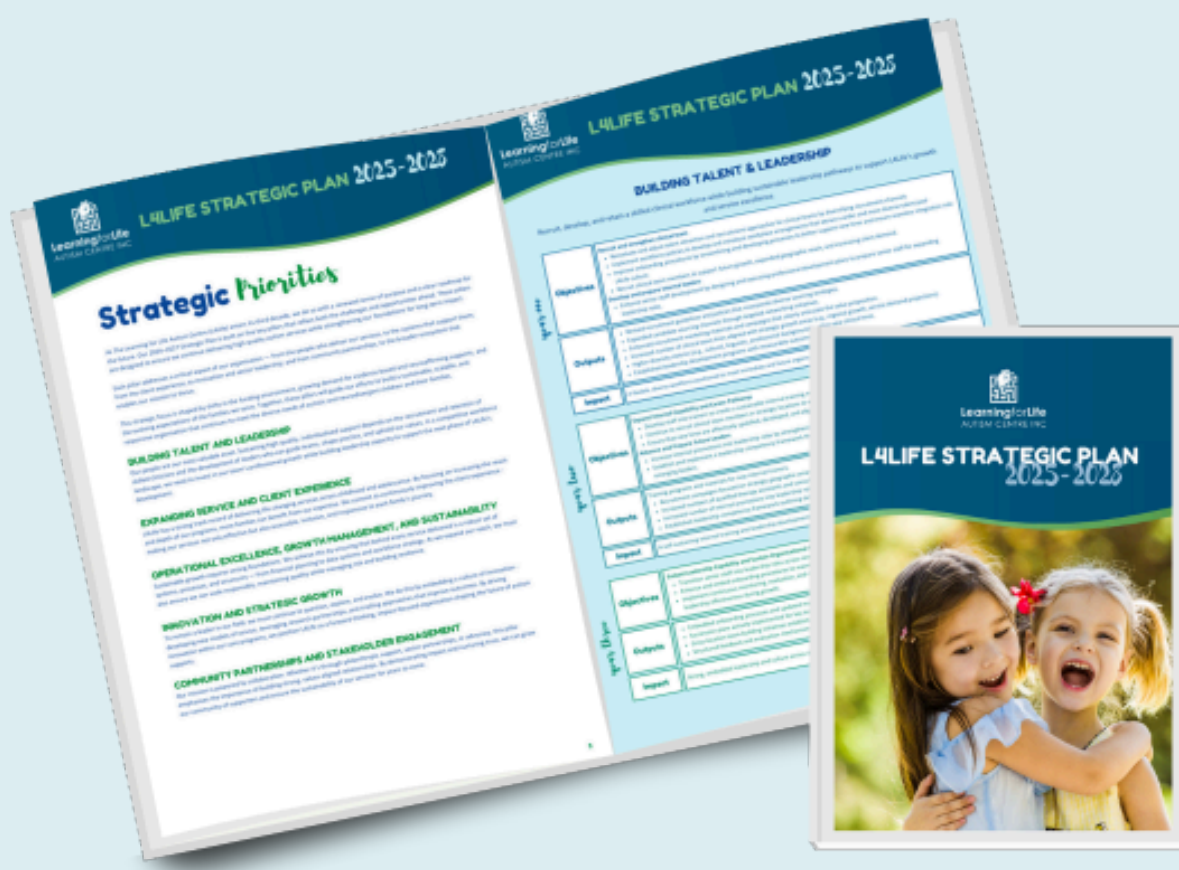


LOOKING AHEAD

The Learning for Life Autism Centre is evolving. We are staying true to who we are, while growing in how, and where, we deliver our impact. We are focused on a future where more families who contact us find exactly what previous families have found: support, understanding, and the knowledge that they are not alone.

We're proud to be delivering on an ambitious and forward-thinking strategic plan. One that challenges us to grow, adapt, innovate and lead with purpose.

If you would like to discuss how you might support the future of The Learning for Life Autism Centre, please email donations@learningforlife.com.au, or phone (03) 9853 4607.





LearningforLife
AUTISM CENTRE INC

25-27 High Street South, KEW, Victoria 3101

ABN: 47 260 122 955

NDIS: Learning for Life Autism Centre is a registered NDIS provider
(Provider Number 4050050613)

9853 4607

enquiries@learningforlife.com.au

www.learningforlife.com.au