

# SUPPORT GROUPS QLD INC.



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## ANNUAL REPORT



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[SUPPORTGROUPS.ORG.AU](http://SUPPORTGROUPS.ORG.AU)  
ABN: 82765396447



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*Melody Edwardson, SGQ President*

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# 2020-2021 MILESTONES

772

*groups listed online  
for referrals  
via our directory.*

147

*complex  
public enquiries*

6186

*unique  
website users*

255

*responses to specific  
requests from groups*

27%

*increase in  
bi-monthly e-newsletter  
subscribers*



Roy Hanfling, Volunteer & Lil Carrigan, SGQ Board Member

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR COORDINATOR

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Selina Utting, Manager & Coordinator

Firstly, we acknowledge the Jagera and Turrbal people, traditional custodians of the land on which we gather, and pay our respects to all Queensland elders, past, present and emerging.

The highlight of our year 2020-2021 was our change of name to Support Groups Queensland. Rebranding to a clear and compelling name has resonated with our members and clients and makes our purpose easy to introduce, *"We provide support for support groups!"*

The COVID-19 pandemic has continued to challenge us and all of our support groups. It has accelerated technology use, complicated gatherings, and challenged personal connections.

We know that more health challenges lie ahead as many people cope with increased anxiety, grief and isolation. During this year, we supported an increased number of groups to rise to the challenge. We disseminated accurate, valuable and timely information, facilitated accessible technology pathways and quickly adapted when plans changed on the fly.

Our support group directory is our primary public engagement tool. The database is constantly updated to ensure people can connect to groups and that details are accurate and searchable.

Our directory profiles small local groups, specialist online groups and groups hosted by large organisations.

All groups benefit from the direct connection that we provide, whether it be individuals being able to connect with a group or emerging groups that wish to connect with more people.

We have continued to engage with multicultural groups, mainly promoting group options to meet in other languages. For example, we set our new online event record with 7606 attendees at an Amharic-speaking health forum.

As 2021 continues and we move into the new year, we take this opportunity through our annual report and Annual General Meeting to present our work and share stories that celebrate the capacity of people to support each other through lived experiences.

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*Selina*  
COORDINATOR  
**SELINA UTTING**



## REFLECTIONS FROM PEOPLE WE'VE CONNECTED WITH

"Over the past weeks, we have been contacted by parents with colour blind students wanting to look at electrical careers. In addition, we have had three parents with colour blind children requiring help and strategies in primary schools. All enquiries were Queenslanders and came through the Support Groups Qld site."

*Colour Blind Awareness and Support Group Australia*

"Thank you for all your work and holding the space for our conversation in such a beautiful, loving way. If you are making the recording public, please send it through the link to share with our communities. I'm so delighted with how it went; what a beautiful piece of work."

*Sarah Roberts, Panellist*

*Dealing with Fertility Challenges and Childlessness forum*

"This is wonderful, Selina! What valuable information. Tell your volunteer this is an amazing piece of work that we appreciate."

*Queensland Neighbourhood Centres*

## SUPPORT GROUPS QLD STRATEGIC PLAN

### OUR MISSION

All Queenslanders share their lived experiences of health challenges to help themselves and each other to improve their health and wellbeing.

### OUR VISION

We support people to find and sustain support groups to improve their health.

We help groups across the broad spectrum of health, including genetic conditions, chronic disease, addiction, grief and loss, abuse, carer responsibilities and mental health.

100's & 1000's  
**Dealing with Fertility  
Challenges and  
Childlessness**



*Promotional flyer featuring Judy Graham,  
Michael Hughes & Sarah Roberts*

## STRATEGY ONE

Develop the capacity of support groups to help their members through adverse life circumstances and serious health challenges.

Research indicates that participation in support groups leads to improved health outcomes across four dimensions: increased social connectedness, increased access to new information, increased capacity to manage health concerns, and increased capacity to self-advocate. Our actions for groups have been diverse across these dimensions. This year, we responded to 255 specific requests from support groups, increasing 24% from the previous year.

Our key role in enabling social connectedness is solving the dilemma of how we get together. We successfully applied to the Brisbane City Council's Seniors Celebration grant and assisted three groups in staging celebrations.

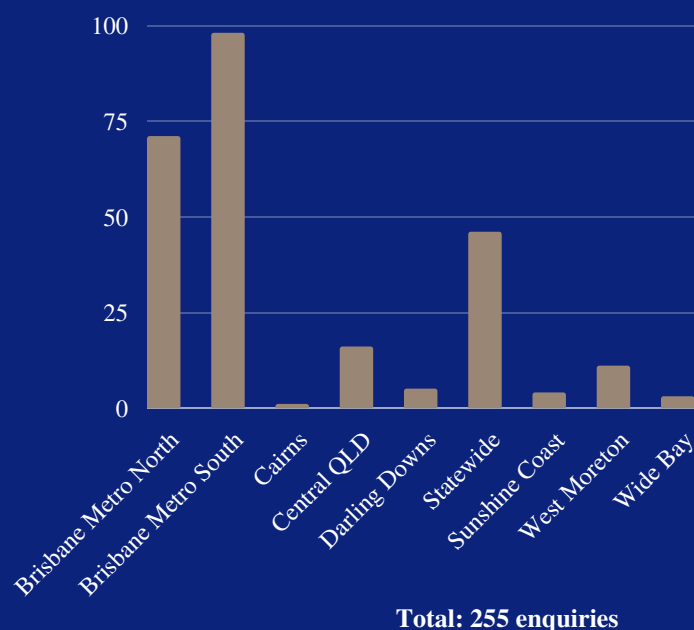
We helped groups to find new venues or to switch online during COVID-19 lockdowns. We produced a series of best practice articles to assist group processes, such as managing disclosure and involving everyone in facilitation.

New information shared with groups included COVID-19 updates, community linkages and specialised referrals. A key indicator of our information distribution is that our bi-monthly newsletter increased its circulation by 27%, and the open rate was 37%, compared to the industry average of 25%.

COVID-19 continues to be an essential health information topic for our service. We gratefully acknowledge the additional funding received from Queensland Health to support our work during COVID-19.

We focused our efforts in this sphere on engagement with disadvantaged groups and cohorts at risk. In July, Seblework Tadesse (Support Groups Queensland Project Worker) chaired a Zoom with Dr Jeanette Young attended by 167 multicultural community leaders entitled "COVID-19: What Is a Second Wave and How Do We Plan for It".

**ENQUIRIES FROM GROUPS  
(BY REGION)**





## STRATEGY ONE (CONT.)

Develop the capacity of support groups to help their members through adverse life circumstances and serious health challenges.

We engaged with pandemic issues in a variety of ways, ranging from basic administration to tailored responses. Our Facebook posts with COVID-19 content had 1349 engagements. We distributed laminated signs, assisted support groups with check-in requirements, and circulated specialised information. This included stroke risks and polycystic ovary syndrome research. We provided additional funding support to the Queensland African Communities Council to engage with their community.

Support groups have reported increased concern for their members' mental health. We distributed information such as handling disclosure, mindfulness strategies and suicide prevention. SGQ promoted the GROW Resilience program and Griffith University's Walk and Talk program. Additionally, we provided linkages to the Carer Gateway, aged care assistance and disability support. Resources from specialised groups were distributed to all groups. This material encompassed information from a range of sources, such as Sleep Disorders Australia and Blue Knot Foundation.

ICESUP CQ continued under auspice during the year, with their group continuing to support families affected by methamphetamine addiction. In addition, their advocacy efforts to the State Government advanced the build of a local recovery centre in Central Queensland.

We received many disclosures about self advocacy following the meetings we assisted: changed carer providers, informed hospital discharge and expedited referral to name a few issues. On eight occasions, we assisted groups and individuals with domestic violence support.



*Sydney Broad, Coordinator for the Mt Gravatt Stroke & Friendship Club*

**"The quality of the newsletter and the whole annual report are so impressive - much better than a lot of large organisations in the sector"**

Industry Partner/  
Reader

## STRATEGY TWO

Encourage people to form and sustain new support groups as new health issues and community needs emerge.

This strategy is informed by public requests for assistance where we identify gaps in the patchwork of available support groups.

In September 2020, we coordinated the Exploring the Seasons of Grief program to create a safe place for individuals who experience complex grief. The program supports participants in learning about the personal impacts of change, loss, and grief while developing communication, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. Additionally, we sponsored two placements for Good Grief's facilitator training.

Thanks to volunteers Madeleine Sayer and Marlene Warnick, we conducted four small group workshop sessions across September 2020. We have continued to support and advise the Young Widows and Widowers groups and connect participants to additional support from this workshop. We forecast a further need for grief supports in the coming year due to COVID-19 itself and disruption to grieving rituals.

A new group to support the Chinese community formed the Chinese Community of Practice, with an initial membership of forty-one people. They meet quarterly to encourage professional development and collaboration with allied health professionals and other support professionals, including smooth referral pathways in the community. We particularly acknowledge the contribution of our volunteer Shiwei Li in translation and new linkages.

As part of her student placement, Lucy Okeny started the Facebook group @youngafricanaustralian with 291 followers in its first six months.



*Shiwei Li,  
SGQ volunteer delivering donated face masks*



*Westside Carer's end -of-year lunch*



## STRATEGY TWO (CONT.)

Encourage people to form and sustain new support groups as new health issues and community needs emerge.

In March 2021, we held a panel discussion on Dealing with Fertility Challenges and Involuntary Childlessness. The event was created due to several requests from people for support for individuals with these experiences.

Attendees were given resources and referrals to online help and our panellists. An attendee said, “all of the speakers were so insightful, great to hear from others in similar situations who know how I am feeling and great to know there is support available.”

We are grateful to hear that many attendees expressed that they felt heard and supported.

We were honoured to have Judy Graham, Michael Hughes, and Sarah Roberts share their lived experiences and insight with our online panel discussion attendees. A message of support was relayed from Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk to the participants.

This strategy to engage with new support groups and emerging health topics has involved us in more than twenty health issues across the past three years. We particularly acknowledge the contributions of all of our collaborators to facilitate our work in this strategy arena.



Letter & photo from the Premier's office



Premier of Queensland  
Minister for Trade

1 William Street Brisbane  
PO Box 15185 City East  
Queensland 4002 Australia  
Telephone +61 7 3719 7000  
Email [ThePremier@premiers.qld.gov.au](mailto:ThePremier@premiers.qld.gov.au)  
Website [www.thepremier.qld.gov.au](http://www.thepremier.qld.gov.au)

### MESSAGE FROM THE PREMIER OF QUEENSLAND

On behalf of the Queensland Government, I send best wishes to everyone participating in the Self Help Queensland event, *Dealing with Fertility Challenges and Childlessness*.

Fertility issues and involuntary childlessness affect about one in six Australian couples of reproductive age, and millions of people around the world.

It is important to know that you are not isolated, and that other people are dealing with similar experiences.

There are many complicated explanations for childlessness. It is pertinent for Self Help Queensland to host this event at this time, with March recognised around Australia as Endometriosis Awareness Month. This helps to raise awareness of a disease which impacts many Queensland women and their loved ones.

Endometriosis is a condition which we should not be afraid to talk about, and this must also be the case for fertility issues and childlessness. People should not suffer in silence.

This is why the Self Help Queensland online panel discussion is so valuable. The panel includes people with lived experience, and professionals who can offer support and advice on coping, healing and ageing without children.

This is a platform to share information, to connect with one another and to create a network of like-minded people. Peer support can be a great comfort.

The conversation and raised awareness are important today, in September during World Childless Week and into the future.

I encourage people to speak up, to be heard and to seek professional advice, if appropriate.

I hope you find Self Help Queensland's *Dealing with Fertility Challenges and Childlessness* informative and fulfilling.

ANNASTACIA PALASZCZUK MP  
PREMIER OF QUEENSLAND  
MINISTER FOR TRADE

## STRATEGY THREE

Improve the access of all Queenslanders to support groups. Expand everyone's engagement with:

- Culturally and linguistically diverse groups,
- Rural and remote communities,
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups.

Due to the increased need for people to engage online, we undertook a systematic update to our directory to increase our groups' contact data.

In 2019, 43% listed a Facebook page and 82% a website. In 2021, 71% now list a Facebook contact and 93% a website. This has increased the options for people contacting a support group via our directory. Thank you to our volunteers who have led this process of connecting with groups, encouraging them to engage online and updating their information.

Most individuals link to groups anonymously via our website, but we receive a small volume of contacts via telephone and email (147).

These contacts are usually complex, where clients have been unable to find support. They are generally longer than 20 minutes, involve multiple referrals to support groups and health professionals, and cover complex presenting issues such as mental illness and violence.

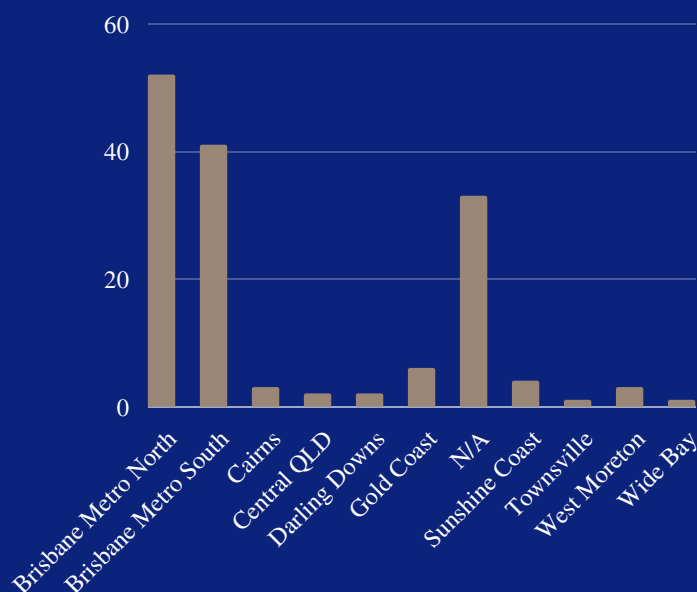
One client let us know she had contacted all four leads we gave her and noted, "This information has been beneficial so far." Another replied "Thank you so much for replying to my email and for providing these services - there are more available than I was expecting." Another response received was "Thank you so much for this I really appreciate it. I'll pass it onto my partner and see what he would like to do moving forward."

Demographically, these contacts are spread across Queensland, and parallel to Queensland population demographics.

# 1954

users accessed our directory  
for a support group

### PUBLIC ENQUIRIES BY PHONE/EMAIL TO FIND A GROUP (BY REGION)



Total: 147 enquiries



## STRATEGY THREE (CONT.)

Improve the access of all Queenslanders to support groups. Expand everyone's engagement with:

- Culturally and linguistically diverse groups,
- Rural and remote communities,
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups.

Locally, as our office is in Sunnybank, we have continued to work with drop-in and information requests from the Chinese community and provide translated resources on our noticeboard.

Our project worker, Seblework Tadesse, assisted new and emerging communities with a diverse range of enquiries and activities. We promoted peace-building training for multicultural community leaders, provided a confidential meeting space for community members, and coordinated discussions about mental health for young people.

We hosted the Australian Ethiopian Eritrean Families Support Group, where Amharic speaking health professionals led three online sessions on COVID-19, mental health, and family relationships. These sessions attracted 7606, 795 and 675 attendees and 6500 views of the recordings. These sessions used a combination of Zoom and Facebook Live engagement.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island groups were assisted with a watching brief for grant opportunities and linking of allied health professionals. We also commenced our plan to collect and promote first nation approaches to group work that can be shared with the support group community. This work will continue in 2021-2022.



*Seblework Tadesse, Multicultural Project Worker*

## STRATEGY FOUR

Ensure that sharing the lived experience of health challenges is a valued part of recovery, sustaining wellbeing and chronic disease management.

Neighbourhood centres operate across Queensland and are great supporters of local groups. During the year, we assisted three centres in evaluating what support groups they could host and what types of groups were missing from their activities.

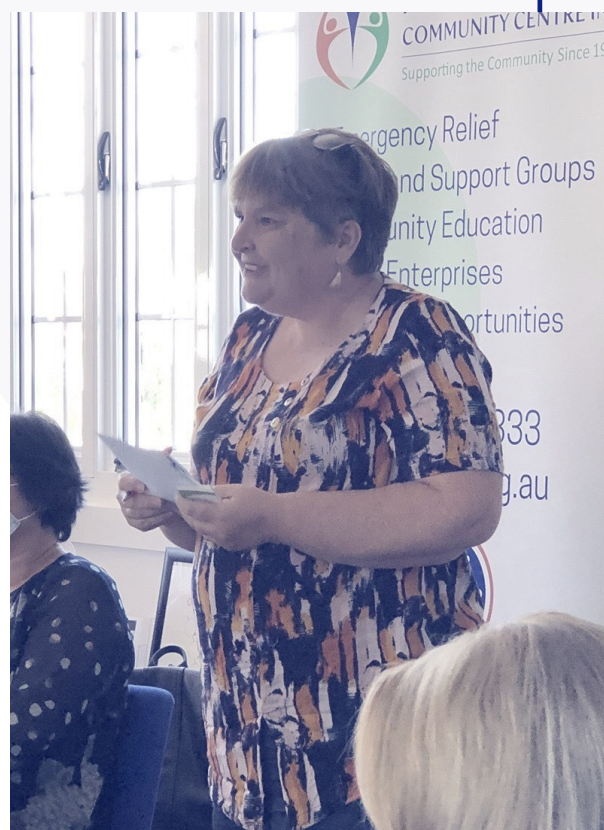
We undertook a more extensive review of whether an individual would find information online about what support groups were available at neighbourhood centres, cross-referenced with our directory.

This review found 58 groups across 140 centres. Neighbourhood Centres Queensland then shared this data with their centres, and several centres advised us of more hosted support groups that were not visible online.

As part of the Greater Brisbane Hoarding and Squalor Strategy Group, we continued to advocate for the evidence-based approach to support groups, "Buried in Treasures", to be a pivotal element to helping people who have a hoarding disorder. With 73 organisational members, this strategy group has continued to integrate strategies to address hoarding in our community. We co-facilitated one support group using this approach at Sherwood Neighbourhood Centre.

We met with Redcliffe Hospital allied health, PHN Metro North and Griffith University to promote the importance of connecting people to peers, not just professionals. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Queensland government's Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation in 2021/2022.

Social prescribing is becoming more widely recognised as a crucial tool in chronic disease and mental health management, and more health professionals are seeking to engage with us. However, we remain concerned that strategies based on lived experience are not prioritised in many organisations and continue to advocate for the importance of peer-led strategies.



*Selina speaking at Mt Gravatt Community Centre*



## STRATEGY FIVE

**Build the sustainability of Support Groups Queensland to allow its strategies to be achieved.**



*Mt Gravatt Carer's Christmas lunch*

The Queensland Health contract, through the self-care funding program, continues to be our most significant grant. As previously mentioned, their increased contribution to respond to COVID-19 was greatly appreciated.

During this financial year, we have also received more grant funding from the Commonwealth to be deployed in 2021/2022 to support CALD communities to engage with disability supports.

Our community lease with the Brisbane City Council is a valuable source of support, enabling us to host several other organisations and meetings during COVID-19. The building flooring was refurbished in June, which caused some disruption but is now easy to maintain.

Technology support and training continued to be provided through InfoXchange, their assistance coupled with the skills of our volunteers and staff, has enabled us to engage effectively online and to advance our back office functions.

Support Groups Queensland has a wonderful group of regular volunteers who generously donate their time. Thank you to Bela, Roy, Lucy, Indigo, Melody, Chris, Kathy, Justin, Joe, Lil, David, Graham, Lucy, Shiwei, Oleander, Ross and Afnan.

It is beautiful to demonstrate the power of volunteers at an organisational level and through the more than 700 volunteer-led support groups that engage with us.

Thank you to our fantastic staff, Selina, Seblework and Louisa. They are all part-time yet juggle competing priorities and the challenging changes of service delivery with respect, energy and innovation.

# TREASURER'S REPORT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH JUNE 2021

It is a pleasure to present this report under our new name of Support Groups Queensland that more closely reflects our mode of operation.

SGQ made a surplus of \$10,826 for the year compared to a similar result of \$10,534 for the previous year. It is important to note that the main reason for the surplus in both years was the \$10,000 received from the Federal Government for the COVID-19 stimulus PAYG boost. These funds are being used for organisational capacity building and rebranding.

Queensland Health continues to provide the primary, recurrent source of income, but this only partly covers staff salaries and not our basic costs. Before the 2019/20 year's end, Queensland Health provided an additional \$43,520 as support for Covid matters, and most of the expenditure appears in 2021/22.

In addition, the Commonwealth has paid \$18,018 as the first instalment of a \$30,000 multicultural and disability support grant. Both these grants are expended under specific terms and therefore are not reflected in the overall profit of SGQ.

However, they have enabled us to employ more part-time staff and volunteers to develop the many initiatives detailed in the Annual Report.

We continue to manage our finances carefully. As a result, the bank account balances continue to exceed all known liabilities, including unspent funds and are considerably healthier than a few years ago.

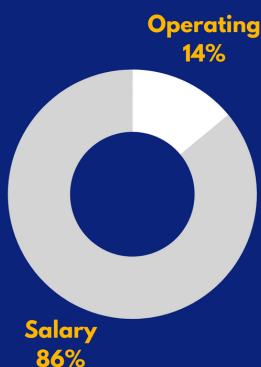
David Hodgkinson CA has issued an unqualified audit report, and we appreciate that this service is provided on a pro bono basis.

Our full audited accounts are publicly available at the [Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission](#).

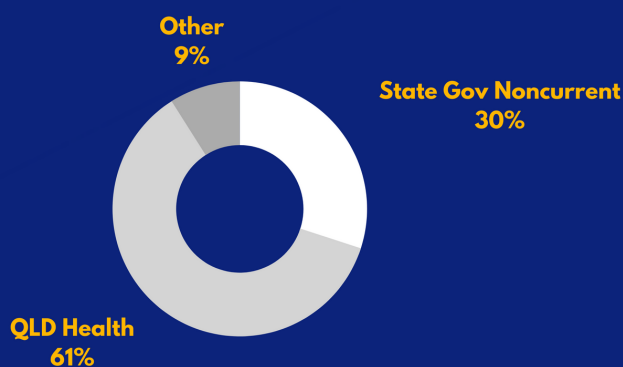
**CHRIS SPRIGGS**

HONORARY TREASURER  
19TH OCT 2021

## Expense Breakdown



## Funding Sources: \$150 081



# OUR PEOPLE

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President: Melody Edwardson

Vice President: Joseph Soda

Treasurer: Christopher Spriggs

Secretary: Elizabeth Carrigan

Committee Members: Justin Scharneck and  
Kathleen Thomas

Manager: Selina Utting

Project Staff: Seblework Tadesse

Administrator: Louisa Devadason

Placement Student: Lucy Okeny

Volunteers: Roy Hanfling, Isabela de Souza, Indigo  
Grigg, Oleander Lam, Lucy Oliver, Afnan Rahman,  
Ross Utting, Graham Willets, Shiwei Li







# Supporting Groups, Supporting You