



Support Groups Queensland

ANNUAL REPORT



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Melody Edwardson, SGQ President with former Vice President Joe Soda

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SUPPORT GROUPS QLD STRATEGIC PLAN

OUR VISION

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

OUR MISSION

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.

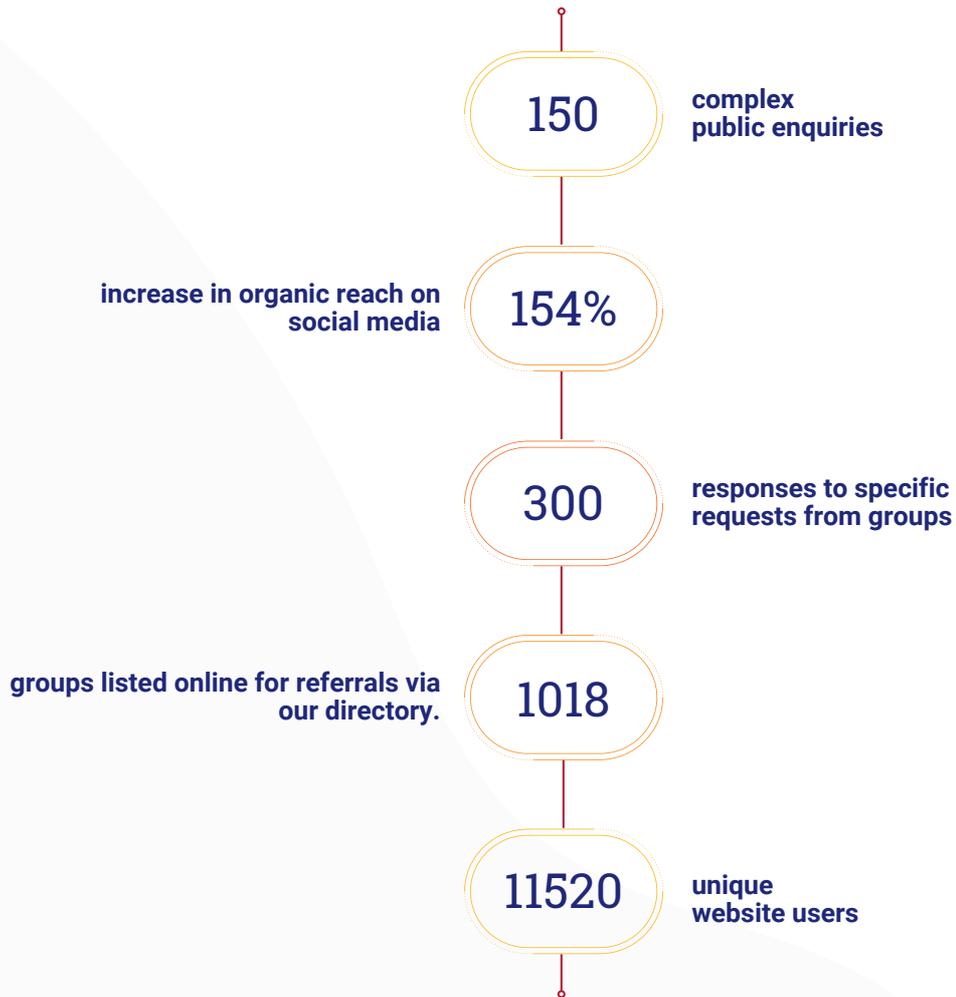
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Meanjin on which we do much of our work – the Turrbal and the Jagera people.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country. We recognise their valuable contributions to circles of mutual support.



2022 SNAPSHOT



SCQ staff and volunteers fundraising at the Bridge to Brisbane

OUR MESSAGE FOR 2022



Melody Edwardson, President and Selina Utting, Manager

We started 2021/22 with our submission to the Queensland Government's Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation. We welcomed this opportunity to profile the power of support groups to reduce loneliness and social isolation.

Further acknowledgement of this power was recognised when our auspiced group, "Happy Chat", was a finalist in the Queensland Mental Health Week Achievement Awards 2022.

Our directory now lists more than one thousand support groups. Our directory represents more than a contact list. We engage with our groups, and they engage with us through social media, individual requests, best practice articles and collaborative projects.

One of the key principles of support groups is mutual reciprocity, where both parties support each other. This value informs our work with groups, where we build long-term relationships based on regular communication and shared commitment.

Given the broad range of groups and health issues we support, our success in attracting small, diverse funding grants has assisted us in providing additional support to several different areas. It remains our priority to attract diverse funding to grow and support diverse support groups.

Support groups remain a volunteer-led arena. While some groups are now embedded in organisations or NDIS funded, the contribution of volunteers remains essential to our work. We gratefully acknowledge the superb contribution of volunteers, who generously support our organisation and all of the many groups across Queensland. In financial terms, the direct volunteer contribution to just Support Groups Queensland approaches \$100 000 annually.



Selina and Melody with James Martin MP and President of the Somali Community Assoc. Qld Faysel Ahmed Selat

Support Groups Queensland has a strong history of supporting multicultural groups, particularly as new and emerging communities have tended to be smaller in Queensland. While significant resettlement and health agencies offer individual support, Support Groups Queensland works to unlock the community's power to support their people through health and wellbeing challenges. This work has been further supported in 2021/22 through our Commonwealth Department of Social Services "Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC)" grant.

Finally, we acknowledge the continued commitment of Queensland Health to funding our work, particularly the change to a five-year funding contract. People need connections that match the time they will experience their health challenges. Therefore, this funding duration is a solid match for our support of ongoing groups, such as those with chronic conditions.

Peer-to-peer work should be valued, recognised and supported. It offers low-cost solutions that are well-recognised as effective in the research literature. We hope that the value of our service and what we can achieve in Queensland can continue to advance in the future.

Melody

MELODY EDWARDSON
PRESIDENT

Selina

SELINA UTTING
MANAGER

STRATEGY ONE

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

This year, we responded to 300 specific requests from support groups, increasing 18% from the previous year. Research indicates that participation in support groups leads to improved health outcomes across four dimensions: increased social connections, 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, and few examples are outlined here.

Increased social connections

One of our key roles in enabling social connectedness is solving the dilemma of how we get together. Many groups needed assistance with finding accessible and affordable venues for small meetings and large events and technological assistance to meet online. We continued supporting groups to cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic issues in various ways, such as promoting free online infection control training access for volunteers. We advised groups about using messaging platforms and closed groups effectively to connect outside meetings.

Another common request is how a support group can engage more people. We assisted with targeted promotion strategies, social media, design work and printing. We assisted groups like Sing to Beat Aphasia with marketing and information material.

In one support group we evaluated, members noted that they know more people since they have engaged with the group and that they had participated in more social outings outside the group meeting.



One parent reported to the support group that she had introduced herself to her neighbours after a group discussion on knowing your neighbours. She had then cooked a meal for her neighbours, a retired Australian couple.

Increased capacity to self-advocate

Groups advocate for their health issues both collectively and as individuals. It can be complex to navigate health pathways, and the average time to diagnose a rare condition is eight years.

Support groups required more information and linkages on topics such as processes for advanced care planning, gendered differences in auto-immune conditions and changing health providers.

A support group attendee shared that their doctor had decided to change their medication. They questioned this, given that they were feeling well and stable. After discussion, the doctor accepted that they might value their stability over possible but unconfirmed benefits of changing.

Happy Chat-Stanthorpe, a group under the auspice of SGQ, was a state finalist of the 2021 QLD Mental Health Achievement Awards. The Awards, Queensland's only state-wide mental health awards, recognise and celebrate individuals, groups and organisations working tirelessly to reduce stigma and support and empower those living with mental illness.

Happy Chat is an independent, grassroots, community-led peer-support group. The primary purpose is to address social isolation and loneliness. For many, Happy Chat is their weekly opportunity to connect, exchange information and socialise with other people who shared their lived experiences. SGQ supported Happy Chat with several grants and community proposals, including a successful proposal to the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal. We want to acknowledge Kath Ives and Happy Chat for all they do in Stanthorpe.



STRATEGY ONE (CONT.)

Increased access to new information

SGQ produced a series of bi-monthly best practice articles to assist group processes. Topics covered include facilitating group check-ins, designing online surveys, considerations before introducing a vaccine mandate, group journalling and singing, men's mental health and more. Our key performance indicator for information distribution is that the bi-monthly newsletter increased its circulation by 5%, and the open rate was 38%, compared to the estimated industry average of 29.5%. Moreover, we are heartened to receive significant positive feedback on the subjects discussed.

We encouraged the groups to copy articles into their newsletters and provided several specialist articles or information to support groups. For example, we briefed Multiple Sclerosis Queensland on the support available for group leaders. Following this, SGQ connected a regional stroke group coordinator to our Committee member Sydney Broad, who has been a stroke support group coordinator for 20 years.

The mental health of their members remained a key topic for support groups. We were honoured to be invited by Scleroderma Association to speak at their conference. Melody, representing SGQ, spoke about mental well-being at the event.

Support group leaders are often the first point of contact for service information. Therefore, we produced a resource sheet for groups listing major phone line services, opening hours and support available.

Thank you, on behalf of The Australasian Mastocytosis Society(TAMS), for your excellent newsletter. Your work is inspiring, and you have reached many people in need of support.

We at TAMS have connected with our members via Facebook and Zoom Support meetings. It has been such a troubled time, and every little bit helps, as you know. We have many new members as our group is growing due to the inclusion of all folk with mast cell diseases, which includes Mast Cell Activation Syndrome.

- feedback from S.D. (TAMS Support, Chairperson)

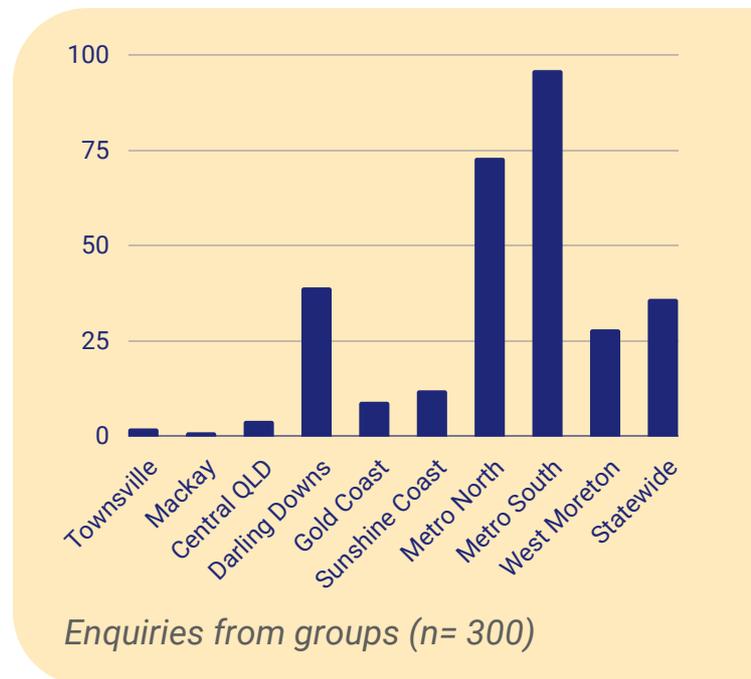
Increased capacity to manage their health concern

Many people in support groups are managing difficult and life-changing conditions for themselves or a loved one. Some examples of requests for capacity-building assistance are outlined below, including increasing the resources available to groups.

We sourced an independent speaker on aged care assessments for Queenslanders with a Disability Network (QDN) Deception Bay. We've worked with Taiwancare's senior group to plan information sessions for Mandarin-speaking seniors. These sessions aim to build their knowledge to navigate health, aged care and more in an Australian context. We supplied targeted information to carer groups about fall prevention. We continued to facilitate our Mount Gravatt, Westside and Redcliffe Carer Groups. The Mount Gravatt Carer's group have moved into SGQ's meeting room and is peer-facilitated by SGQ volunteer Roy Hanfling.

We continued our relationship with the Somali Community Association of Qld. We worked closely with President Faysel Ahmed Selat to enable a community consultation on disability in the Somali community.

This consultation led to an advocacy organisation hiring a community facilitator to support the Somali community in identifying and supporting community members not yet on the NDIS. Additionally, a disability service provider from the community could brief the community on their culturally responsive support. Life member Trish Fallon also assisted the Association with grant writing and events at the Somali house.



The brain cancer support group is under the auspice of SGQ. They expressed concern that if they were an organisation, they might not be able to manage given the difficulties of living with a brain injury and the high possibility of losing key office bearers.

SGQ is honoured to support them through insurance, administration and check-ins.

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 and emerging community issues and requests from individuals who want to start a group.

New Groups

Following SGQ's promotion of Griffith University's Walk and Talk program, we supported the formation of a Cantonese-speaking Walk and Talk group that is now running independently. Melody and our volunteer, Shiwei Li, ran a Wheel of Wellbeing workshop for the group, which received positive feedback.

SGQ attended the inaugural meeting of Chinese allied health practitioners Community of Practice facilitated by Shiwei and Dee Lim. We covered the venue costs and supported Shiwei and Dee in reviewing a framework that would underpin their group. Over 20 allied health professionals worked through the complex case study and conceptualised their approach based on their organisations' responses. Many early career professionals attended, and the leading community elder Dr Mervyn Cheong also attended the group's meeting. Sadly, this meeting was one of his last engagements before his passing at 88 years old.

SGQ has partnered with Communityfy to develop and facilitate multicultural mothers' support groups at the Community Hubs. The project design is women-centred and led by the women themselves. The project achieved significant outcomes across a short period of group meetings facilitated by Selina. They demonstrated the value of a small support group for multicultural mothers in improving their collective well-being. Our project successfully applied for funding through the Investing in Queensland Women grant so that this work will continue from 2022 to 2023.

SGQ assisted in the community consultation of QDN in Redcliffe to form a new support group, which has now come to fruition. Redcliffe Peer Support Group meeting for people with a disability now meets monthly.

We also advised a community member who decided not to start a group but instead to start a collective online blog to highlight her traumatising health journey to reach others differently. We believe that sometimes starting a new support group may not be the best-suited strategy based on the person's priorities.

Following the record engagement of the Ethiopian and Eritrean community via our Zoom workshop in Amharic in 2021, an ongoing group has formed that meets monthly online and is continuing discussion about complex family issues.

We assisted with several meetings to connect multicultural people to supports in the Inala area, following the recommendations of the "Well Connected" report. We also participated in the Inala Health Education cluster meetings, including seeking feedback on parenting resources for the multicultural community.

As Long COVID became recognised as a serious phenomenon, we identified support group resources internationally, connected to the Australian Long COVID Community group via Facebook and circulated other relevant group information such as the Australian Pain Management Association.

STRATEGY THREE

Improve the access of all Queenslanders to support groups. Expand access for people who experience disadvantages and multiple health challenges.

While most individuals link to groups anonymously via our website, we receive a small volume of contacts via telephone, email and Facebook direct messages. These contacts are usually complex, where clients need help to source appropriate support. These calls generally exceed 20 minutes and involve multiple referrals to support groups, non-profit organisations and health professionals.

2570

users accessed our directory for a support group

From our office in Sunnybank, we have continued to work with drop-in and information requests. Most of these requests are from the local Chinese community, and we provide essential translated resources on our noticeboard.

We have engaged with many multicultural community groups, where Support Groups Queensland assists on a topic-driven basis. As an issue emerges in the community, we can assist them in engaging their people with existing mainstream supports, often at the community's central location.

We supported Graham Willets and the Depression Prevention support group by producing over 200 resource flyers for distribution and presenting alongside him at the Mount Gravatt Low Vision support group meeting. He has presented to veterans, Centrecare and low-vision organisations about the power of support groups and his experience with depression.

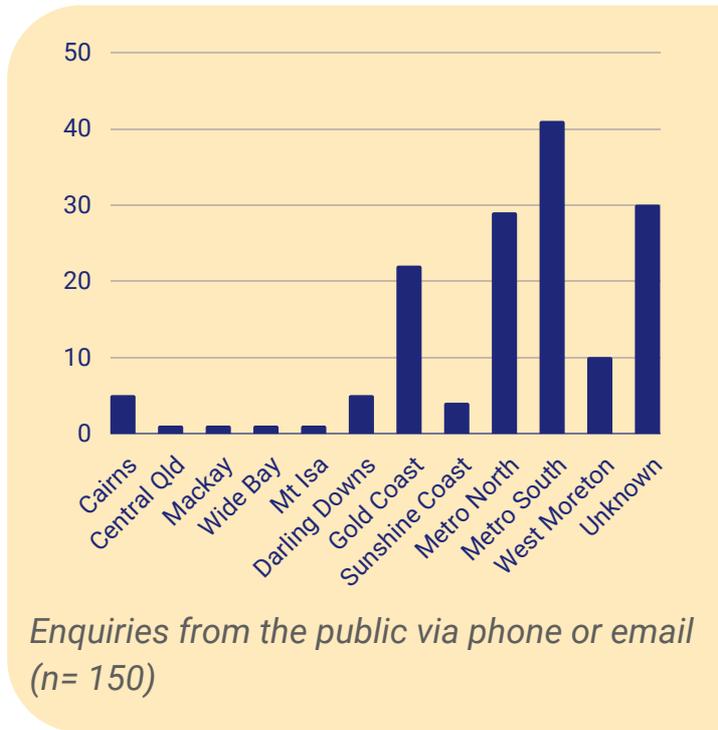
In regional contacts, we have worked with people in smaller regional centres such as Stanthorpe, Nanango, Gympie and Yeppoon.

Specialist member-based organisations like the Queensland Women’s Health Network news and the Unit Holder’s Association of Queensland profiled our service and the importance of belonging and support groups. Our work was shared face-to-face at a wide range of monthly community events, on radio 101FM and via social media.

We are working to improve social prescribing so that GPs and allied health professionals can build informal and peer-led support around their patients.

This work has included engagement with Primary Health Networks, the Disability Gateway and Queensland Health, and also local health providers.

Social prescribing is the necessary action we have focussed on in our Parliamentary submission outlined in Strategy Four.



Enquiries from the public via phone or email (n= 150)

Public feedback

I was not aware of these and was left to find things like this myself. Thank you for your concern, I really appreciate it.

Hi, your directory is helping me a lot after a period of isolation.

Thank you. The psychologist had not mentioned that (self-directed recovery tools). Thanks again.

STRATEGY FOUR

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

Addressing Social Isolation

SGQ contributed a submission to the Queensland government's Parliamentary Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation in August 2021. Excerpts of our submission were included in Report No. 14, 57th Parliament Community Support and Services Committee, published in December 2021.

We advocated for building social capital, noting that building quality relationships and increasing opportunities for social interaction are critical protective factors against social isolation. We called on medical and health professionals, the government and non-government sectors, to demonstrate an increased commitment to social prescribing.

We emphasised that people join support groups, patient organisations and social groups that can connect people to others who share the same journey. We also emphasised that peer support should not be an afterthought.

Our submission is available online on the Queensland Parliament website or SGQ's News and Resources page.

Resource Development

Indigo Grigg, an SGQ volunteer, reviewed and collected research articles on support group effectiveness. We now have a systemised database of the research evidence about support groups, a watching brief on emerging research and share pertinent information with our networks. We've shared the data collection with our sister organisation, Connect Groups in Western Australia and GROW Australia.

This year, we are excited to present our E-book, Support Groups: Starting and growing a Peer Support Group, Reflections from the Field. The information outlined in this resource has been developed to over many years and will assist people to set up and maintain peer support groups. The resource outlines how group members can work together, many different options in forming groups and common issues faced by groups. This resource is designed for anyone considering starting or currently involved in a peer support group. This resource outlines some key things to consider before setting up the group, during the planning and development phase, and during the group's life. A series of suggestions and tips, listicles, and templates are included throughout the guide.

Building more robust engagement from community and health professionals

Via LinkedIn, we have commenced a new communication strategy to connect and engage with the community and health professionals. The content is focused on group facilitation and examples of peer-led support. While this content development is just commencing, initial responses to our articles have been positive.



Selina with the team at GROW Australia

STRATEGY FIVE

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

Our largest funding resource has continued to be Queensland Health's commitment through the Self Care Funding Program. This grant enables us to employ one staff member, provide ongoing support to groups, run the directory, and assist with public enquiries. We greatly appreciate this support, particularly Queensland Health's support of a longer-term funding contract, which enables our planning and future project design.

Support Groups Queensland has a wonderful group of regular volunteers who generously donate their time. Thank you to Bela, Roy, Melody, Chris, Kathy, Justin, Sydney, Britney, Graham, Joe, Lil, David, Lucy, Shiwei, Oleander, Kim, Ross, Lucy, Indigo and Afnan. It is beautiful to demonstrate the power of volunteers at an organisational level and through the more than 800 volunteer-led support groups that engage with us. Our volunteers support us with a wide range of skills, including pro bono audit, technology management, facilitation, translation, journalism, social media, fundraising, data entry and cleaning. We estimate that the value of our volunteers' efforts approaches \$100 000.

We value the support of the Brisbane City Council, who provides our community lease at Sunnybank Hall. This non-commercial lease enables us to provide the level of support to groups we have achieved this year. The small Brisbane City Council's Seniors Celebration grant assisted three auspiced groups in staging social gatherings.

This financial year, we have built a solid portfolio of small, diverse grants. They are:

- The Commonwealth Department of Social Services "ILC Building" grant has funded us to connect multicultural people experiencing multiple sources of disadvantage to NDIS and community support.
- The Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) supports our auspiced Happy Chat support group for mental health in Stanthorpe.
- The Queensland government's Gambling Community Benefit Fund grant has enabled us to rebuild and redevelop our website.
- The Commonwealth's Volunteer Grant, facilitated by Graham Perrett MP, supports training and travel for our volunteers.

In addition, with Community's support of the pilot for multicultural women's parenting groups at Community Hubs in 21/22, we have led a successful proposal to the Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney General's "Investing in Queensland Women" program, which commences in 22/23.

Our fundraising efforts have diversified, including Bridge to Brisbane, Containers for Change, donations, and workshops.

Our collaborators have been magnificent, particularly the contribution of small unfunded support groups. They have provided venue support, guest speakers, grant collaboration and pro bono advice.

Appreciation

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



Sydney Broad

Thank you to everyone who has supported us in 2021/22. Our work is truly a group effort.

Due to factors caused by the pandemic, the Mt Gravatt Stroke and Friendship group has decided to cease meeting formally and moved to casual morning teas.

We greatly appreciate Sydney and Max Broad's dedication to the group for 20 years and Sydney's participation in our Management Committee.

TREASURER'S REPORT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30TH JUNE 2022

We have now been using our new name, Support Groups Queensland Inc, for over a year, more closely reflecting our mode of operation.

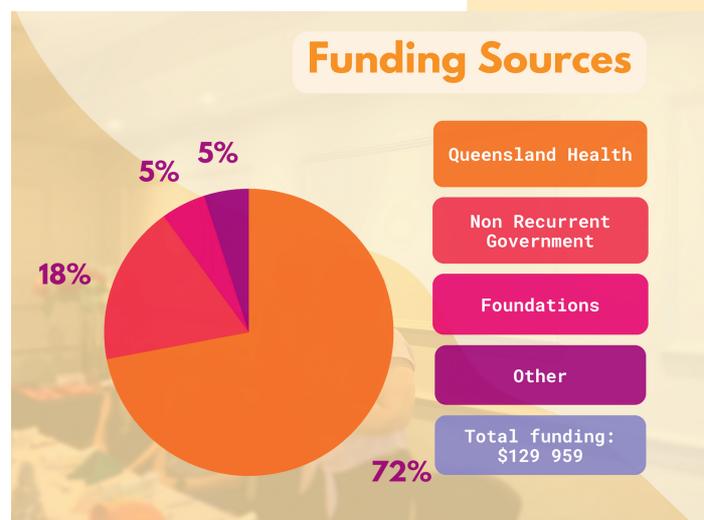
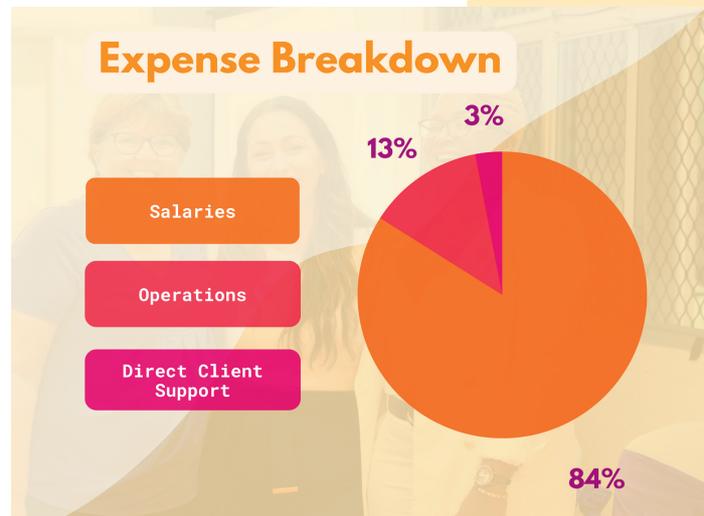
SGQ made a deficit of \$13,049 for the year up to 30th June 2022, compared to a surplus of \$10,826 the previous year. The planned spending of the ATO Covid grant from previous years fully explains this deficit. This spending has enabled us to capacity-build and also rebrand our organisation.

Queensland Health continues to provide the main recurrent source of income, which funds wages and our basic program.

We have been very fortunate to be successful in further grant funding through our hard work in identifying and managing these grants. These include the Foundation for Rural Regional Renewal with the Happy Chat Team in Stanthorpe and the Gambling Community Benefit Fund for rebuilding our website, as well as the Australian government's NDIS ILC Building Project. They have enabled us to employ part-time staff to develop several new initiatives.

We continue to manage our finances carefully. The bank account balances have slightly improved and continue to be more than all known liabilities, including unspent funds.

David Hodgkinson CA has issued an unqualified audit report, and we greatly appreciate this service is provided on a pro bono basis. Our full audited financial statements are available online at the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission.



Chris

CHRIS SPRIGGS
HONORARY TREASURER
25TH NOV 2022

OUR PEOPLE

President: Melody Edwardson

Treasurer: Christopher Spriggs

Secretary: Britney Evans-Mackay

Committee Members: Sydney Broad, Justin Scharneck
and Kathleen Thomas

Retiring Committee members: Joe Soda and Elizabeth
Carrigan

Manager: Selina Utting

Multicultural Projects: Seblework Tadesse

Administrator: Louisa Devadason

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



Funded by

