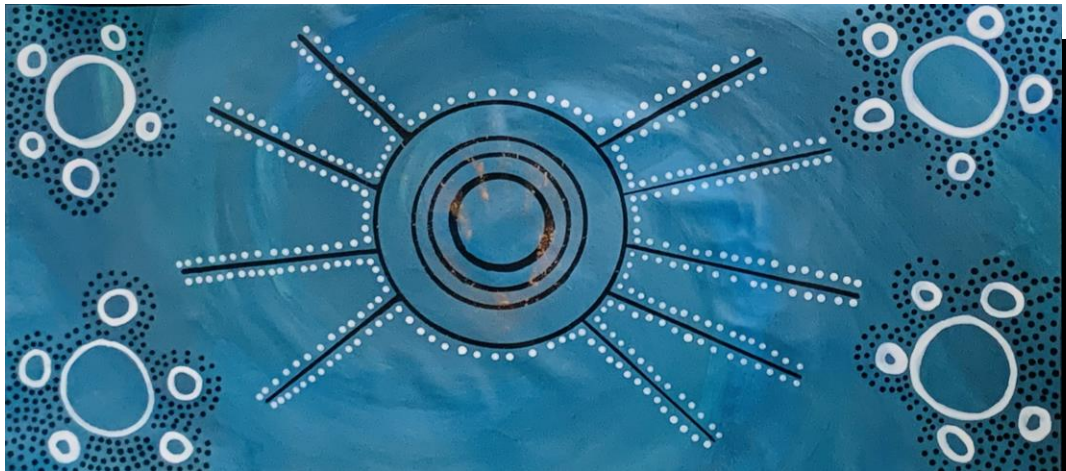




ANNUAL REPORT

2023



Guiding STaR, by Courtney Coralee

FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON



Special Teaching and Research (STaR) Ltd is committed to providing inclusive learning opportunities for people with disabilities across early years, school-aged and post-school settings. Our Special Educators collaborate with educators and support workers, providing professional development, coaching and mentoring services. We believe that with the right support, all people can learn together, and it is our mission to achieve access, opportunity, and acceptance for all people with disability. STaR is dedicated to embedding research evidence into our practice, contributing to the evidence base in special and inclusive education.

One of our primary objectives this year was to increase our profile and be recognised as an industry leader in special education. Our alliance with The Institute of Special Education (InSpEd) has been invaluable, providing expertise and guidance in disability, specifically intellectual disability and autism. We have also established working relationships with four universities and several larger early-years and post-school providers, demonstrating the importance of collaboration and sharing knowledge.

We strongly believe that our moral obligation is to balance good business practices and our role as a non-profit organisation. Our culture prioritises making an impact over building an empire. Through vigilant management of STaR's finances and maintaining a secure capital base, we were confident to invest funds into long-term business growth and operational systems this year. Ultimately, these investments benefit people with disabilities and those who support them, which is our mission. We deeply appreciate the continued support from The Australian Stockbrokers Foundation, MonSTaR Foundation, AXI, and an anonymous philanthropist.

After nine years as Chairperson, I will be stepping down from the role but will remain a director on the board. I would like to thank my fellow Board directors for their guidance, trust and support, and our extraordinary team of staff for their contribution to the lives of people living with disabilities and their commitment to special education. I'm in awe of STaR's achievements and am honoured to have had the opportunities that I have. Together, we've made significant strides, and I look forward to seeing the continued success of the organisation.

VBorbone

VALENTINA BORBONE
Chairperson

FROM OUR CEO

STaR has continued to strengthen its reputation as being experts in inclusion and special education. The organisation has had the opportunity to collaborate, advise, and provide support and training with both State and Federal government, universities, providers, and community members. However, it is essential to maintain a proactive approach and avoid committing beyond our organisational capacity.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused disruptions in many professional relationships and community networking events. However, it has been heartening to see these groups re-emerging and bringing together individuals who share a common interest in sharing knowledge and resources for the mutual benefit of our community. Witnessing people gathering in person again to create meaningful connections is encouraging.



This year, we applied for NDIS provider registration, which had a ripple effect across all areas of our operation. All staff members contributed, highlighting the diversity of their roles and skills. We successfully completed the NDIS Certification Audit without any required changes and now await provider registration.

Our work in early childhood education centres primarily focuses on the Blacktown LGA, and we value the strong relationships we have established with indigenous educators, children, and families over the years. This year, we made a commitment to develop a reconciliation strategy and identified six practical actions to demonstrate our belief in creating a more inclusive and compassionate society that recognises and celebrates the First Nations peoples. As part of this plan, we wrote an acknowledgement of country and collaborated with Courtney Coralee, a talented Wiradjuri artist and STaR mum, to create an artwork that reflects the values and story of STaR.

The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability was established in April 2019. The recently published recommendations highlight the importance of a better-qualified workforce to improve opportunities for inclusion and self-determination, especially for individuals with significant intellectual disability. Special education is critical in ensuring equal access to quality education for all people. It is not about a setting, i.e. special schools, but rather, it enables learning in any setting and is key to high-quality, inclusive learning for people with disabilities and learning delays. The perception of some that special education is anti-inclusion is far from the truth. Special education is not outdated or ableist, but rather, empowering, and we will continue to advocate for its importance.

I am privileged to work alongside Board Directors who are committed to STaR's vision and mission, and I remain grateful for their trust and confidence in me to perform my role effectively. I lead a team of exceptional women, each with diverse skills and beliefs. Despite our differences, we deeply respect one another and the people we work with. This shared respect will undoubtedly drive the growth of STaR as an innovative and impactful non-profit organisation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'M Meaker'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

MARGARET MEAKER
CEO

ABOUT STaR



OUR MISSION

To achieve
ACCESS,
OPPORTUNITY and
ACCEPTANCE
for all people with disability



OUR VISION

With the right support,
all people can learn together

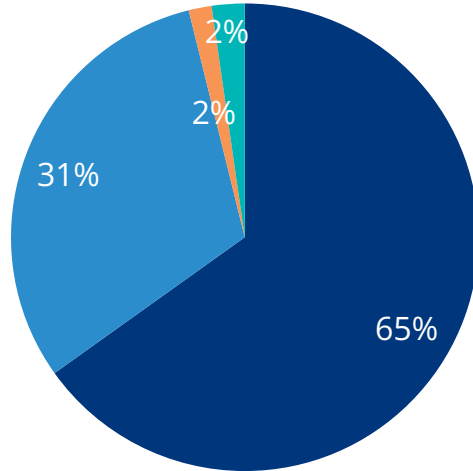


OUR VALUES

Respect
Integrity
Social Justice
Empathy

OUR FINANCES

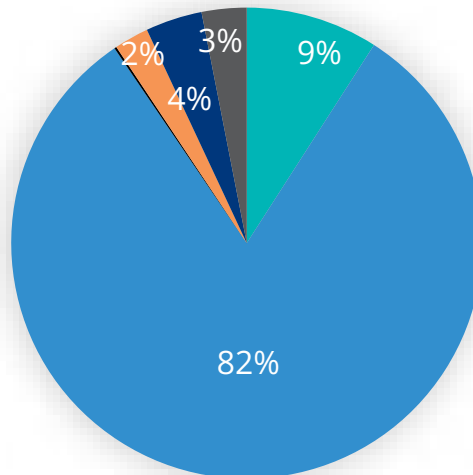
Where the funds came from



- Donations & Sponsorship
- Government Funding
- STaR Education
- Other

STaR Income for FY2022-2023
\$1,009,591

Where the funds go



- Administration
- Salaries & Wages
- PD, Research & Marketing
- Rental and Utilities
- Consultancy Fees
- STaR Education

STaR Expenses for FY2022-2023
\$1,236,170

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED 2023

1. EDUCATING EDUCATORS

Quality, research-based professional development and mentoring

1.1 STaR Education

- Developed two new inclusive early childhood education webinars, funded by the NSW Department of Education (DoE) through the Sector Development Program.
- Delivered the series of seven webinars (funded by the NSW DoE through the Sector Development Program) to over 1500 early educators across NSW.
- Launched the STaR inclusive Early Childhood Education webinar series nationally.
- Developed and delivered guided practice projects, including professional development and coaching, to non-STaR affiliated early childhood services.
- As invited speakers, presented at the TAFE Children's Centres Conference and NSW DoE Schools as Community Centres (SaCCs) Facilitators Network Day.

1.2 STaR Research

- Presented at the International Society on Early Intervention and Division for Early Childhood joint conference 'Integrating Research and Practice in Early Childhood Intervention' in September 2022.
- Presented at the Inaugural Professionals and Researchers in Early Childhood Intervention conference in November 2022.
- In collaboration with the InSpEd Research team, submitted three articles for publication in peer-reviewed journals.
- Commissioned Dr Jessica Zanuttini from Sydney University to complete a review of post-school programs for young people with disabilities and identify 'pockets of excellence'.
- Established a post-school disability research group with representatives from Charles Sturt University (Dr Rahul Ganguly), Macquarie University (Dr Coral Kemp), Sydney University (A/Prof Mary-Ann O'Donovan and Dr Jessica Zanuttini), and Western Sydney University (Prof. Rebekah Grace).



2. LIFELONG SPECIAL EDUCATION

Implementing best practice across lifelong learning, delivering evidenced-based programs and support for people living with disability

2.1 Early Years Programs

- Supported 51 children in five centres in Blacktown LGA and one in northwest Sydney.
- Induction of a service in Baulkham Hills to join our Lighthouse Program in 2024 has started.
- Special Educators are engaged in ongoing professional development in Practice-Based Coaching (PBC).
- Collaborated with Dr Yuriko Kishida and Dr Coral Kemp to trial using an assessment tool to measure child engagement.
- Certification achieved to assess Aboriginal children for developmental delay using ASQ-Trak.
- Lighthouse Services offered NESI-accredited PD webinars throughout the year.
- Three family workshops were held over the year to support families in navigating decision-making and advocate for their children to learn alongside their peers.

OUTCOMES ACHIEVED 2023

- Megan Cooper attended the 10th SNAICC conference in Garramilla/ Darwin 5-7 September with Karen Minter, Director of Yawarra ECEC. Attended monthly regional ACCO meetings, strengthening our relationship with SNAICC .

2.2 Post-School

- Commenced working in a second supported living home, Star Mates Co-op, which was established for two former STaR kids.
- Post-school college model development has continued and is well underway.
- Commenced coaching and mentoring in a post-school setting.

2.3 Family Support

- All STaR Families were contacted following their individual planning meetings quarterly to answer questions and hear any concerns.
- Special Educators worked closely with families to support them with documentation, medical appointments, and school enrollment.
- Supported families to attend school meetings and orientation visits with their children.
- We continue to offer former STaR family's advice and support.



3. INFORMING COMMUNITIES

Advocating for special education to a range of audiences

3.1 Consultancy and Advocacy

- Special Educator, Philippa Wong, was invited to present on "Inclusion in early childhood education and care" at Bedford College.
- Margaret Meaker and Coral Kemp spoke to several media outlets after the release of the final report from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability.
- Submitted feedback on iPart Affordable Accessible ECEC, Early Years Strategy Survey, and NDIS review to the state and federal government.

3.2 Communication

- STaR's 20th Anniversary book was published.
- Social media posts averaged 2 per week across all platforms. Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn have all had a significant increase in followers.
- Two staff from our STaR-affiliated ECE centres were nominated for the Western Sydney Women Awards by STaR.
- Donated 20 boxes filled with household essentials and food to young parents in need in the Hills/Hawkesbury area as part of their participation in Reverse Advent Calendars.
- Contributed to the InSpEd Insights newsletter.

WE ACKNOWLEDGE

Our Board Members and Staff

For their ongoing commitment to the Vision and Mission of STaR



Dr Coral Kemp
Founding Director



Valentina Borbone
Chairperson



Margaret Meaker
Director



Kristy Michael
Director



Dr Rebekah Grace
Secretary



Margaret Meaker
CEO



Melissa North
Manager, Operations & Relationships



Megan Cooper
Manager, Families & Education



Sarah Carlon
Manager, Research & Education



Christie Kedward
Operations Coordinator



Elise de Jong
Special Educator



Philippa Wong
Special Educator



Sarah Roberts
Educator



Jodie Toohey
Educator

WE ACKNOWLEDGE

For their invaluable support of STaR

Philanthropy and charitable donors



Funders



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

Business support



Partners



Courtney Coralee

Courtney Coralee is a talented Wiradjuri artist and STaR mum

About the Artwork

This artwork is full of symbolism. The symbols in the corners represent not only the first five STaR children but all the children who have benefited from the STaR program. The background represents the challenges and difficulties of parenting, which can be as unpredictable and challenging as a riptide. The circles in the center symbolize the STaR board, while the lines reaching out from it symbolize the support and knowledge that the STaR team provides to families, children, and educators. The orange outline of Courtney's son's hand, who is currently a STaR child, connects to the logo, which was created from the handprints of the first five STaR children in 2001.



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LinkedIn: @STaRltd

Instagram: @STaR_ltd

Special Teaching and Research (STaR) Ltd is a registered charity. By donating to STaR, you're helping people with disabilities to access lifelong learning. All donations of \$2.00 or more are tax deductible. <https://star.org.au/support-us/donate-now/>