

Connecting young people



ReachOut Australia
Year in Review
2020/21

to the support they need

04	Messages from the Chair and the CEO
08	A year at a glance
10	Alex's story
12	Empowering the community
14	Nigel's story
16	Our community of partners
18	Jeanti's story
20	Our supporters
22	Financials

This report covers the period 1 Oct 2020 – 30 Sep 2021.

We acknowledge the traditional owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present. We recognise connection to Country as integral to health and wellbeing.

We also acknowledge people with lived experience of mental ill-health and recovery, along with their carers, families, and supporters. We value the courage of those who share their unique perspectives for the purpose of learning and growing together to achieve better outcomes for all. We recognise their vital contribution to the sector and to the development of ReachOut's service.



“2021 has been an unprecedented year for all of us. And, with everyday uncertainty and continued disruption, it has been a particularly challenging time for young people in Australia.”

Message from the Chair

2021 has been an unprecedented year for all of us. And, with everyday uncertainty and continued disruption, it has been a particularly challenging time for young people in Australia. Significantly, this year has seen mental health services play an important role in the lives of young people and their parents, and placed a spotlight on the increased importance of investing in innovative new services to ensure we can keep up with the demand and service preferences of young people.

This year, millions of young people, parents, carers and educators sought support, advice and guidance from ReachOut. ReachOut's youth service provided more than 2.6 million visitors with vital information on issues such as coping with stress, managing the pressures of school and study, body image, depression or family conflict, as well as resources, online peer support and pathways to professional help to support them through the year.

As my first report as Chair, I have been reflecting on the year that was and thinking about the Class of 2021 who have had it particularly tough this year. With disruption to their daily routines, a shift to online learning for many and important rites of passage being missed, it has been a particularly challenging time for them and their families. I am also in awe of those who have bravely shared their lived experiences to inspire hope in others who have walked in their shoes. With one in four young people in Australia currently experiencing a mental health difficulty and 70% not seeking help, digital mental health support is an important source of support for so many and an increasingly significant part of the wider Australian mental health system.

The new Federal Government funding we have received this year has made it possible for us to not only continue to deliver our service, but also to innovate. We continue to build and improve our evidence-informed service with the goal of connecting all young people to the information, community and pathways they need to be happy and

well. With this funding, and the support we receive from our corporate partners and generous community fundraisers, the financial year 2020/2021 closed with a surplus. As part of a three-year plan to deliver more impactful services, the Board has approved a deficit budget for the coming year and modelled deficit budgets for the following two years. Without this funding, we would not be able to deliver support to as many young people (and their parents, carers and schools) and would not be able to continue to operate at the forefront of digital mental health service delivery in Australia.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the passionate and driven team at ReachOut, led by our inspirational CEO Ashley de Silva, as well as my fellow board colleagues and our incredibly generous supporters, near and far, of which there are so many. It is thanks to all of these incredible individuals that ReachOut is the most accessed online mental health service for young people and their parents in Australia.

I would also like to extend a heartfelt thank you to ReachOut's former Chair, Julie White, who stepped down in February. Her contribution to ReachOut and to youth mental health over more than 20 years has been nothing short of extraordinary. We would not be in the strong position we are in today, investing and evolving the service to meet the needs of tomorrow, without her leadership.

So, as the year comes to a close, I hope that young people, their parents, and educators continue to look for ways to look after their mental health and to support each other as we will always be stronger and more resilient together. Here's to a steadier, more connected and community-driven 2022.

Andrew Wilson
Chair, ReachOut Australia





“Together, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to inspire hope and enact unprecedented change for the mental health of young people in Australia.”

What a year it has been. Last year was tough on so many levels but this year has thrown a whole new set of challenges at all of us and continued to test our resilience. Young people, parents and schools have been significantly impacted by the events of 2021 and everyone’s mental health has been affected in some way, shape or form. From lockdowns, to remote learning, and the continued health, social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been a challenging year all round.

But for every challenge there is an opportunity to deliver lasting change. For us, 2021 meant more than helping people through the immediate challenges of the pandemic. It was also about looking ahead and making sure we are well prepared to support young people, parents and schools as they adjust to living with COVID-19 in the community.

As you’d expect for a digital, youth-focused service, innovation remains a strong focus at ReachOut. We continue to evolve the service to meet the changing needs of young people and parents and have recently created a refreshed online community with exciting new features. (And keep an eye out for further innovations being rolled out next year that will set the pace for our next chapter of digital mental health service delivery.)

In 2020, 454 young people in Australia aged 15–24 died by suicide, and sadly it remains the leading cause of death among young Australians. This year, we’ve worked hard to make sure young people knew they were not alone and to equip them with strategies to cope with their experiences. More than 3 million people sought support from ReachOut. We helped each of them by boosting their knowledge and confidence, and by providing tools and support to engage with effective self-help strategies to improve their mental health status, reduce suicide risk and increase help-seeking behaviour.

The Government’s focus on mental health and wellbeing reform has been extremely positive this year – but there is so much more to do. We are especially grateful for the new federal funding we received in the Budget and the ongoing generous support of our corporate partners and community fundraisers, which has enabled us to continue to build on our service delivery model. Our evidence-informed service is integral to the mental health system, and working towards integration – on a national, regional and local scale – with our equally committed sector partners is vital.

I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to everyone who has been part of the 2021 journey – our incredible youth ambassadors, volunteers, supporters, partners, board members and our team. You are the heart and soul of this organisation and I couldn’t have asked for a better bunch of individuals to work alongside during this challenging year. Your resounding passion and commitment to making a difference in the lives of young people is nothing short of extraordinary.

So, as we adjust to living with COVID-19 in the community, let’s pace ourselves, practice self-compassion and continue to be kind to one another. Together, we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to inspire hope and enact unprecedented change for the mental health of young people in Australia.

Ashley de Silva
Chief Executive Officer, ReachOut Australia

In another year defined by COVID-19, young people and parents were left feeling uncertain and stressed about what their future holds.

We connected 58,324 young people and 43,549 parents across Australia in a safe place where they could open up, and find more support when they needed it.

Young people shared their experiences and found support on ReachOut's rebuilt Online Peer-Support Community, sharing more than 18,685 posts.

We helped parents find solutions and support by connecting them to other parents in similar situations, with 1853 posts being shared on the ReachOut Parents' Online Peer-Support Community.

And, we undertook 1172 duty-of-care interventions across our online communities to ensure that the community members were safe, and to connect them with urgent support and other services when they needed it.

We responded to the unique needs of young people and parents through personalised support options.

We provided 96,265 personalised support recommendations through NextStep, connecting 9659 young people to other services for specific needs.

More than 704 parents received customised support plans – personalised to their family's needs – as part of our one-on-one parents support program in partnership with The Benevolent Society, helping them guide their teen through tough times.

And, we helped teachers better understand the wellbeing needs of students transitioning from primary school to high school. More than 15,000 students completed a survey through our Student Snapshot tool which aims to identify mental health challenges being faced by students, and help teachers build and deepen relationships with those students.

We were there for young people when they were in urgent need.

We partnered with Lifeline to deliver a data-driven, seamless integration to support young people at risk of suicide. Using a series of digital tools, we identified 4000 young people who were experiencing suicidal ideation and connected them to Lifeline through personalised referral pathways.

On ReachOut.com, our 'Urgent Help' page was viewed more than 43,000 times. And, in addition to our work with Lifeline, we connected 97,537 young people to the right support at the right time through referrals to other services.

We reached young people and families across Australia, connecting them to the information and tools they need to understand their experience and feel better.

In total, more than 3 million people sought support from ReachOut across our services for young people, parents and schools. We provided information to help young people boost their knowledge and confidence, and delivered tools and support so they could engage with effective self-help strategies to improve their mental health status, reduce suicide risk and increase help-seeking behaviour.

We continued to evolve our service to meet the changing needs of young people and parents, engaging more than 5300 young people in the co-design, evaluation and testing of ReachOut's products and services.

2,613,513
REACHOUT.COM
(Young people) visited by unique Australia visitors.

485,971
REACHOUT.COM/PARENTS
visited by unique Australia visitors.

216,199
REACHOUT.COM/SCHOOLS
visited by unique Australia visitors.

We built a community of more than 33,500 mental health advocates and supporters through *Laps For Life*, *Run4Life* and *Make A Move*, empowering them to improve their own wellbeing while supporting the 1 in 4 young people experiencing mental health challenges in Australia.



Alex's story

Content warning:

this story references suicide and self harm.

I started experiencing mental health challenges when I was 11. My low self-esteem and negative self-talk was all consuming and gave way to self-hatred. I didn't know where it was coming from and I didn't know how to deal with it.

By age 12 I was self-harming and experiencing suicidal ideation. No one around me knew I was self-harming and when they found out, they didn't know how to support me.

It's interesting the way mental health difficulties can play out so differently for different people. For me, I continued to do well at school and this often meant people assumed I was okay. But I was losing interest in all other areas of my life. I was living day-by-day.

It was difficult for me to explain what was going on to my family. They didn't really understand mental health. I wanted to get professional support, but they didn't get why I couldn't just talk to them about what was going on. Thankfully, they did let me see a counsellor which really helped me start navigating my feelings and made me feel better.

It was around this time I realised I was transgender. Finally, all these feelings started making sense. At the end of Year 7, I came out to my parents. This was a really challenging time, particularly because my parents weren't supportive of me transitioning until I was 18, and I didn't see myself surviving until then. Thankfully we were able to work through some of these tough times by talking a lot, listening to each other and making compromises.

Doing Year 12 through two years of COVID-19 was also tough. Remote learning made it hard to stay connected, and I'm from Melbourne, so we had one of the toughest lockdowns. I already felt a lot of pressure to get the marks I needed for uni. It felt so much harder with the isolation and disruption of COVID-19.

Thankfully, I've now finished my final year of high school and I am looking forward to focusing on my passion - being a mental health advocate. I want to keep telling my story to encourage other young people to learn more about their own mental health and get connected to the right support whenever they need it. My biggest achievement to-date is still being here. The things that have been game changers for me include being able to use the pronouns I want to use, dressing how I want to dress and getting both the health and mental health support that I need.

Digital mental health support has played an important role in my mental health journey. For example, connecting with friends online has been a huge help for me. I'm more prone to struggling at night and it can be hard to feel okay at night, when I'm alone and in-person support isn't available. Knowing my friends were there to listen has been vital for me. It's so important to talk to someone, particularly when you're in a moment of crisis or just having a bad day.

I know that ReachOut's Online Community gives young people the chance to connect with their peers and find support, any time, any place. I know how important that can be, especially when you don't feel like you have anyone to confide in.



Empowering the community

Through *Laps for Life*, *Run4Life* and *Make A Move*, ReachOut has built an empowered community of mental health champions across Australia. These events are making a real difference to people's lives by encouraging participants to do something positive for their own mental health while providing support for the 1 in 4 young people currently experiencing mental health challenges. In 2020, 454 young people aged 15–24 died by suicide. Our *Laps for Life*, *Run4Life* and *Make a Move* supporters helped ReachOut to continue to provide relevant and impactful services to support youth suicide prevention.

Laps for Life, *Run4Life* and *Make A Move* are month-long events that bring people together through physical and self-care activities that raise funds to allow ReachOut to continue supporting young people in need.

Taking part in *Laps for Life*, *Run4Life* or *Make A Move* increased participant's capacity to initiate conversations about mental health and the impact suicide has had on them, their families and their communities.

Championing the value of sharing lived experience at a community level has given our supporters the opportunity to meaningfully connect around a shared cause – both online and within their immediate community and network.

Participants from across the country share messages about swimming, movement, wellbeing and fundraising to their social media accounts. And, they also share experiences of mental ill-health, suicide, recovery, memories of loved ones and hope. In 2021, stories about mental health reached more than 1.8 million people through *Laps for Life* social media.

"I just wanted to take a minute to applaud you (and your team) for the way you have run this fundraiser. My son ... is only 10 years old. Participating in this has opened up some really good conversations around mental health. From your side the updates and explanations around how the money has been/will be spent has been fantastic. He has been so proud of himself when reading the updates about how he has helped..." - Female, NSW

ReachOut has created a connected community of like-minded participants who are improving their own wellbeing while supporting youth mental health.

After engaging with our events, participants were more connected, felt their mood had improved and were proud of their achievements.

"I'm half way through my 20km goal and can't believe how good I feel! I swam 50 laps today and it felt like nothing. My mental health has improved tenfold due to the routine of waking early and giving myself quiet time before I start work ... Love knowing that I am part of this community and that we are helping others that may be struggling with their own mental health." - Nicole

Over the last three years, the *Laps for Life*, *Run4Life* and *Make A Move* communities have raised more than \$3 million. These funds have enabled ReachOut to provide relevant and impactful services. In 2021, the funds raised from these events were particularly important in helping ReachOut respond to the escalating needs of young people throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

ReachOut would like to extend a huge thank you to the community for helping improve the lives of young people across Australia.



Nigel's story

I grew up in Melbourne in a relatively normal family – a Filipino household, tight-knit, and very family-focussed. I had two parents who cared for me and two older brothers. Like most other siblings, we had our fair share of fights but other than that, we were pretty normal. Being the youngest, I was the baby of the family and was closest to my mum. My uncles and aunties would always say how much we looked alike. I mean we both have a beauty mark in the same spot on our left shoulder.

Everything went well in primary school and when I transitioned into high school I had support from teachers and friends. I was doing well in school and gained a lot of confidence. Then, when I was in Year 10, something happened that changed my life. I got home from school one day in September and my mum told me and my middle brother some very bad news – my mum had been diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer. Mum was a nurse for over 20 years and had dedicated her life to helping others. She never smoked, and always took care of her health. It came as a shock, not only to her, but to our entire family.

Mum's health deteriorated rapidly and she passed away a few months later on New Year's Eve. This was two weeks after my eldest brothers' birthday, less than one week after Christmas, and eight days before my 16th birthday. I had to face a new reality where my mum was no longer by my side.

To be frankly honest, it was just a shitty year. I made mistakes, ruined some relationships, struggled to focus and learnt quickly that people I thought were my friends weren't really there for me when I needed them. I even fought with my brothers and dad. My sleeping pattern was chaotic and I struggled to stay focused

at school. It was during my darkest days that I realised I needed help. I didn't know how to process something that happened so quickly. I remember being worried about asking for help and because I went to an all-boys school, I felt the stigma associated with mental health and seeking support. I did talk to my middle brother about getting help and I was surprised that he had nothing but support for me.

There was one night I specifically remember. I was sitting at the dining table, feeling overwhelmed with the emotions I was experiencing, and I read some of the fact sheets about trauma and grief on the ReachOut website. It helped me come to terms with how I was feeling and that it was normal. If only I'd known there were online communities back then, I can only imagine how much better I would have coped.

Over the last two years of high school, I spoke regularly to a counsellor about the issues I was facing – school, family, grief and trauma, friends, and my future. I had my down days where it was hard to dig myself out of it all, but with the support of my counsellor, my family and my close friends – I have been able to see the silver lining in my hardship.

I have a job now that I am appreciative of and I'm able to share my story with others in the hope it empowers them to seek support too. The kind of help I got and the wealth of information and online communities available today, are a great place to start for someone who might feel they're alone.

Even today I still follow ReachOut's content and advice. It's a constant reminder of how much I have grown. Not only in the last 10 years but even this year. I am still growing and learning more about myself.



Our community of partners

At ReachOut, we pride ourselves on developing mutually beneficial partnerships that support our work and provide opportunities to engage with the wider community around mental health and wellbeing. The core of this approach is a commitment to building relationships that put authenticity and mutual accountability at their heart - partnering together to drive impact, innovation and change in the community.

Our broad-ranging engagement toolkit enables us to provide significant benefits to our partners - from wellbeing resources and virtual sessions, volunteering opportunities and signature events advocating for youth mental health, to our amazing Youth Ambassadors sharing their own mental health experiences to inspire others in the community to find connection and hope.

Collaboration with partners in another year impacted by Covid-19 required innovation and creativity from all, and we are very proud of what we achieved together. Online events became the norm and although we've missed being out in the community with our partners, digital activations made events more accessible, allowing us to reach different audiences and hear from diverse perspectives.

Thank you to our partners for your incredible support and continued generosity throughout the year. We have loved working with you!

"7-Eleven Australia works in partnership with ReachOut in support of Australian youth mental health via the 7-Eleven community program, Good Cause. The young people, families and supporters who engage with ReachOut's services are reflected in the 7-Eleven customer basis; they are who we serve through our stores and the communities we are part of."

ReachOut consistently demonstrates a clear understanding of the 7-Eleven brand and business, seeking to reflect this understanding through the work we do together. Together we have been able to partner on and deliver several values-focused and mutually-beneficial projects during the course of our partnership. 7-Eleven is so proud to support ReachOut and their work."

Katherine Murray

Community Partnerships Lead, 7-Eleven

"Connection is especially important in these uncertain times, playing a vital

role in strengthening and supporting our communities. Stockland CARE Foundation's partnership with ReachOut Australia is built on a commitment to support and empower our communities by providing resources and networks to enhance the mental health and wellbeing of young Australians and their parents."

Through multiple and varied initiatives including the Mental Health Month webinar series with ReachOut's Youth Ambassadors, Wear It Purple Day engagement and ongoing communications to our customers and residents, ReachOut continues to be a partner that prioritises authentic and meaningful support to Stockland's stakeholders."

Bonny Bayne

National Manager, Stockland CARE Foundation

"The Audi Foundation has been a proud partner of ReachOut for over 5 years, supporting the development of ReachOut's Parent Service. Audi is a proud champion of ReachOut's wellbeing campaign Make A Move and other collaborations including working with the Audi Magazine, providing wellbeing resources to Audi dealerships for the benefit of their teams and also their customers."

The ReachOut team is always open to new and meaningful opportunities that create mutually beneficial outcomes for their partners, demonstrated through deepening collaboration and a strong understanding of the Audi Foundation's mission and customers."

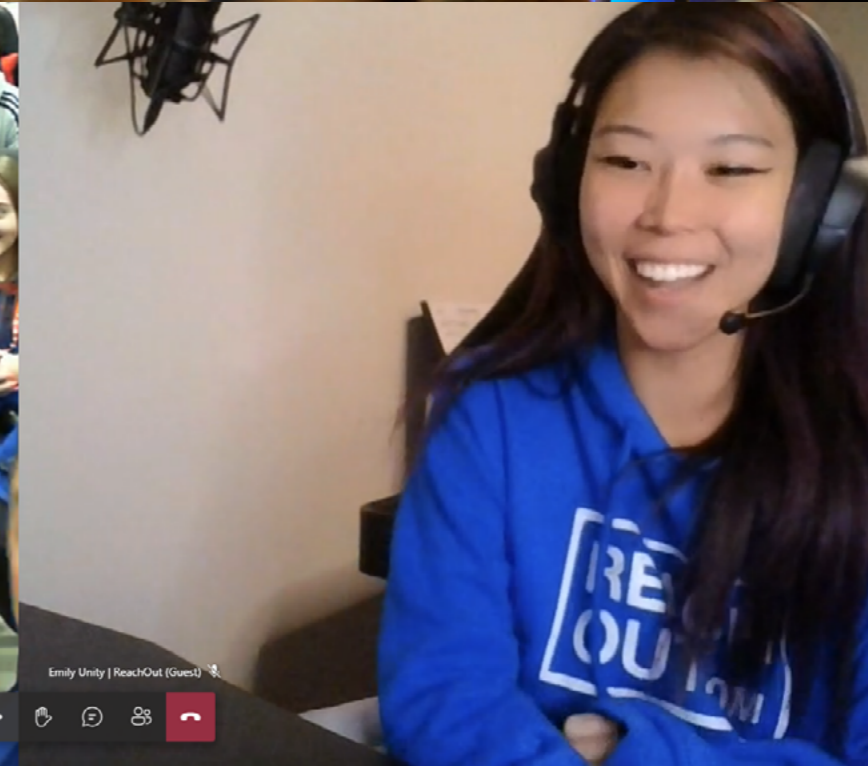
Hayley Nissim

Audi Foundation Lead

Discover more about **collaborating with our Youth Ambassadors here.**

Discover more about our **Partner and community events here.**

Discover more about **ReachOut's signature events here.**



Content warning:

this story references suicide and self harm.

Things were super-easy for the first 17 years of my life. Great family and friends, I did well at school, was involved in a tonne of extracurricular activities and was well-liked. But when I started Year 11 (my first year of the HSC), things started to unravel. I say the HSC was the spark that started the fire but the kindling was already there – my unhealthy relationship with achievement, my perfectionism and a little bit of genetic susceptibility – but that little spark very quickly triggered an inferno much bigger than school.

So this fire started one day at recess. I was just standing there, eating some grapes and chatting with my friends when all of a sudden – like someone flicked a switch – I was overwhelmed by the most intense and physical feeling of nervousness I had ever experienced and this feeling didn't go away. I only understood it as 'anxiety;' after a teacher helped me make that connection and encouraged me to get help. I did get help. And then I decided I was 'better.'

Of course, you can't decide you're better, and soon, the anxiety came back. And then it morphed into a bleak and heavy depression that was thick and black and all-consuming. It was largely a physical feeling of flatness, dread and hopelessness that extended far beyond sadness and led to intense suicidality. I did get a break, however, when my depression morphed into mania. Mania feels like the speed of your brain has been turned to 150 per cent. Energy is boundless and thoughts are flying. My manic episodes were destructive but the most extreme problems started when the psychosis hit. Psychosis for me was super-scary because I couldn't tell which thoughts were my own. It got so severe that in one psychotic episode, I harmed myself seriously enough that it resulted in the loss of my leg.

Through this whirlwind of mental illness, I experimented with many different treatments, including different psychological techniques, medications, multiple

hospital admissions and electroconvulsive therapy (also known as 'shock treatment'). For a long time, nothing worked. But then, about 5 years after that initial anxiety I felt at recess, things started to turn the corner. I began to control the fire and was on the road to putting it out. It wasn't instantaneous, but it did happen. I was making my diet healthier, doing more exercise, taking a semester off uni, connecting with a good psychologist and revisiting a medication that had worked in the past. It was these things coming together that made me realise that recovery is a bit like unlocking a combination lock. Only you don't know if your combination involves two or three or seven numbers. But the one thing you do know is that it can be unlocked, you just have to keep persevering.

I was very fortunate that I had a support system rally around me. My friends, family, church and school were determined to help me out and stuck by me from the get-go. ReachOut also played a part in this. When I first got my diagnosis of anxiety and really knew nothing about mental illness, the fact sheets on ReachOut's website were invaluable. They provided clear information in a time where I was blinded by the smoke of a new mental illness. The Online Community, where I was able to connect with other young people, reminded me that I wasn't the only one fighting a fire, and I gained solidarity through that.

So, what about now? I have finished my science degree and have started an honours year doing mental health research. While I still take medication and see a psychologist and psychiatrist, I consider myself very stable. I think my story shows that recovery is possible – even in severe cases or those with comorbidities.

ALL experiences of mental ill-health are valid and need to be taken seriously. As I like to say, an ocean and a puddle are just as wet. I promise there is help out there, it's just about finding what help works for you.



Thank you

We'd like to acknowledge our Government Partners, the Australian Government Department of Health (DOH) and the Department of Social Services (DSS) for their funding and support for our work.

Thank you to all of our partners for their incredible generosity in ensuring ReachOut can continue to provide young people access to the conversations, communities, information and support they need to be well and stay well.

With your vital support, we've been able to help more than 3 million people from communities across Australia through another challenging year.

ReachOut is committed to delivering innovative, relevant and accessible services, and your incredible generosity champions that commitment to positive mental health.

Thank you for everything.



Our supporters

Government Partners

We'd like to acknowledge our Government Partners, the Australian Government Department of Health (DOH), the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) and the Department of Social Services (DSS) for their funding and support for our work.

Platinum Partners



Diamond Partners



Gold Partners



Silver Partners



Bronze Partners



	\$	\$	%	%
	2020/2021	2019/2020	2020/2021	2019/2020
INCOME				
Government grants	5,077,447	4,814,563	40%	40%
Donations	6,401,750	4,742,157	51%	40%
Non-government grants	998,061	1,375,660	8%	12%
Government COVID-19 stimulus funding income	0	827,500	0%	7%
Interest income	115,770	152,323	1%	1%
Consultancy and other income	40,601	13,415	0%	0%
Total Income	12,633,629	11,925,618	100%	100%
EXPENDITURE				
Employees	5,209,755	4,631,192	50%	46%
Design and delivery of services	3,117,756	3,367,005	30%	33%
Marketing	1,001,833	923,571	10%	9%
Fundraising	426,034	355,250	4%	4%
Administration	293,180	371,636	3%	4%
Occupancy	355,977	312,792	3%	3%
Depreciation and amortisation	60,465	109,722	1%	1%
Total Expenditure	10,465,000	10,071,168	100%	100%
OTHER COMPREHENSIVE INCOME				
Net fair value gain/(loss) of financial assets	45,838	(61,532)		
Surplus	2,214,467	1,792,918		

Note from ReachOut's Chair,
Andrew Wilson:

ReachOut continues to make fiscally responsible decisions which include committing to retaining at least four months of operating expenses in an Operating Reserve (\$5.1m). With the generous support of partners, and incredible support of the community response to Laps for Life, the financial year 2020/2021 closed with a surplus of \$2.2m. As part of a three-year plan to deliver more impactful services, the Board has approved a deficit budget for the coming year and modelled deficit budgets for the following two years.





© ReachOut Australia 2022

ABN 27 075 428 787 DGR 442 641

Suite 2.04, Level 2, Building B
35 Saunders Street
Pyrmont NSW 2009
Call us on +61 2 8029 7777
or email info@reachout.com

ReachOut is Australia's leading online mental health organisation for young people and their parents. Our practical support, tools and tips help young people get through anything from everyday issues to tough times – and the information we offer parents and schools makes it easier for them to help their teenagers and students, too.