



2023

our Year at a Glance

our Vision is that every child's development is nurtured by the community to ensure they reach their potential.



“Thank you for supporting, encouraging and helping our baby girl come along in leaps and bounds! Thank you for caring and loving her and allowing her to shine! We appreciate it more than you will ever know!”



“Thank you for welcoming us into the family and thank you for all your advice, service, love and compassion. We are so very grateful for all the wonderful times and experiences Aleks has been involved in. We are so proud and happy to see how he has embraced every challenge and new experience. Thank you for guiding and supporting him.”



“Thank you FKF Team! Your ongoing support over the past 2 years has been incredible. You have all changed Elias and our family's life.”



A MESSAGE *from the Fit Kidz Foundation*

As more children are being diagnosed with developmental delays, autism and additional needs, the need for supports and services continues to grow within our community. During the year of 2023 our dedicated team of early childhood specialists and therapists supported 182 children and their families through our range of early childhood supports.

Whilst these early childhood supports are vital in ensuring these children are given the best chance to be independent and active members of our community, the Fit Kidz Foundation also recognises how important it is to support the whole family. We are thrilled to share that this year we hosted our first siblings program, SibWorks, with thanks to a grant from CommBank Staff Foundation.

We also hosted a range of events which support our families to connect with each other, often reducing social isolation and normalising their journey. Events have included:

- Hosting our 'Stronger Together' Conference in July. The purpose of 'Stronger Together' is for local parents who care for a person with a disability to form meaningful connections with each other, to hear from inspiring guest speakers to normalise their journeys and to connect with local supports and services who may have a positive impact on their family's quality of life.
- Hosting three school holiday exclusive events at Inflatable World.
- Hosting an exclusive family Christmas party at Crocs Playland where 165 people attended.

Another core objective of the Fit Kidz Foundation is to build a community who understand, support and include children with a disability to ensure they (and their families) have the opportunity to be active and meaningful members of our community. Over the past two years we have been collaborating with the events team at The Hills Shire Council to discuss opportunities to increase inclusion at council events. This year in December they launched a first-ever Sensory Sensitive Session at the Mayor's Children's Christmas event. This was a wonderful opportunity for families to access this event in a more quiet and supported way. The Fit Kidz Foundation also hosted a sensory breakout space at Glenhaven Carols, meaning that families who require this type of support were able to access this wonderful community event.

Key service highlights include:

- Launching new group programs: School Ready Kidz, Sing, Sign and Storytime and Kidz Club.
- Launching our Therapy Assistant Program: a program where families can access a therapy assistant who is an allied health professional in training, resulting in reduced costs and waiting times for accessing supports.

Key achievements include:

- Receiving Highly Commended in The Hills Shire Council Australia Day awards for Community Group of the Year. We were honoured to receive this award from our Mayor, Dr Peter Gangemi, against so many wonderful community groups.
- Being a finalist for a 2023 National Reimagine Award for Social Impact in the space of Early Intervention. The Social Impact category had 4 finalists, and we were specifically chosen for our Stronger Together conference.

In regard to industry change, in December 2023, the final report of the independent review into the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) (NDIS Review) was released. In the Final Report, the NDIS Review highlights four key themes for reform of the NDIS and sets out 26 Recommendations and 139 Supporting Actions to achieve these reforms. Whilst early childhood supports remains a priority for the NDIS, we hope that the proposed reforms are the best way to ensure sustainability while also achieving a fairer system.

In 2024 we are focused on proactively seeking out more space to ensure we can meet the growing need within our community. We are also focused on continuing to build connections between families who care for a child with a disability and continuing to work closely within our community to improve access and inclusion for all people with a disability.

The Fit Kidz Foundation, and its programs and services, is only possible because of the support we receive from our community. We rely on our community and the wider community to continue to raise awareness about the importance of early childhood supports so that we can continue to support our families through their journey of early intervention and beyond.

Melissa Scaife, Co-Founder

Ellen Witzlsperger, Service Director



FAMILY STORY

Aleks and the Bonic Family

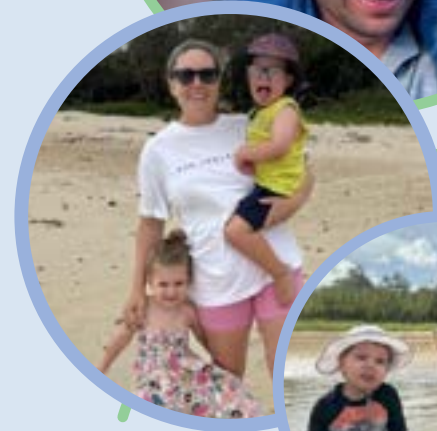
When Aleks was a baby he was very happy and content, which certainly hasn't changed. After a normal paediatrician check up at 4 months old he was prescribed glasses for Esotropia. This was our first curveball. He then began showing a delay in reaching physical milestones and began seeing a paediatric physiotherapist around 12 months old. At 15 months old he began having infantile spasms and after presenting to the Children's Hospital and undergoing some tests, we learnt he has IDIC 15 - a rare genetic condition where there is a triplication of chromosome 15. At 20 weeks pregnant with our daughter and discovering our son's genetic condition, it wasn't easy and it was hard to think about what the future held. We pushed on knowing our beautiful boy deserved everything and accessed the NDIS and landed an amazing occupational therapist, physiotherapist and speech therapist. We then received Aleks' autism diagnosis and began to feel more confident about his journey and what path we should continue on.

We began accessing the Fit Kidz Foundation group programs for Aleks' two years prior to school. As an early childhood teacher myself, I struggled to see how Aleks could have been supported in

a mainstream childcare setting. Learning about and accessing the Foundation has helped bridge that gap and provided Aleks the opportunity to be involved in group settings and spend time interacting and engaging with other children. Aleks has thrived in this environment and has been fully supported every step of the way by all the wonderful and dedicated ECTs, OTs and Speechies. Seeing Aleks enjoy attending group settings has helped us to feel more ready and confident for his schooling journey as well. The Foundation provided an abundance of information and support around schooling options and were always available to answer any questions or just be listening ears when it all got a bit much!

What a beautiful, special, inspiring and overwhelming world Aleks has shown us. He has paved the way for us to make every day count, keep pushing on, keep learning and keep advocating. He has helped us find patience, resilience and joy on the hardest days and we wouldn't have him any other way.

"Today you are You, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is Youer than You." - Dr. Seuss.





STRONGER TOGETHER

2023 Conference

EVENT PARTNERS



THE HILLS
Sydney's Garden Shire



CommBank
Staff Foundation

SPONSORS

Bankstown
Sports

Give2Asia
AUSTRALIA



On Saturday 29th July we hosted our second Stronger Together Conference. The conference was attended by over 200 parents and carers who care for a child or adult who has a disability, additional needs or neurodivergent needs.

We were joined by an incredible line-up of guest speakers including Sandy Golder, the founder of Kindship, Jo Abi, journalist and mum of three children with autism, Briana Blackett, journalist and mum of two boys, Rob Hale, dad-advocate for his son, Kate Strohm, the founder of Siblings Australia, Dr Vicki Gibbs, Head of Research at Aspect, Ainslie Robinson, an autistic woman and mum of two autistic children, Seana Smith, co-author of *The Australian Autism Handbook*, and Michael Theo, Mr A+ from *Love on the Spectrum*.



Guests had the opportunity to connect with local supports and services, with over 35 exhibitors showcased, including neurodivergent entrepreneurs, Max Blackett from AromaDough and Damian Borg from Scrub by Damian.

It is with many thanks to our event partners, The Hills Shire Council and the CommBank Staff Foundation, that we were able to put this event on for a second year. We would also like to acknowledge our major sponsors, Bankstown Sports Club and Amazon Give2Asia, along with our table sponsors at the event who, without their support, we could not offer tickets at a highly subsidised price.

Stronger Together Conference is a unique and impactful initiative developed by the Fit Kidz Foundation and we look forward to continuing to host this annually for our local community.

"Such a great day to connect with peers and break from the normal routines of being a parent to an additional needs child. A great initiative to support the community."



"I am so grateful for this conference, the presenters were all honest and real, sharing very personal experiences so generously."

"It was a fantastic day to be a part of. I really enjoyed listening to the guest speakers. I thought they shared insightful stories and spoke from the heart."



SIBLINGS Program

In 2023, we launched our SibWorks School Holiday Program aimed at children between 8-12 years with a sibling with neurodivergent needs or a disability. The SibWorks program was created by Siblings Australia and facilitated by our trained SibWorks facilitators over a three-day period. We had 18 children attend the program across both the July and October school holidays at the Fit Kidz Foundation.

The SibWorks program aims to provide siblings with the opportunity to connect with other siblings, support siblings to develop an understanding about their brother or sister's disability, explore their strengths and uniqueness as well as their sibling's, strengthen siblings' communication with their families and friends, and support siblings to develop new ways to cope with tricky feelings.

The children who have a sibling with a disability can be often overlooked when it comes to providing support so it was fantastic to be able to offer a program that is purely for them.

Our SibWorks School Holiday Program would not have been possible without funding from the CommBank Staff Foundation grants program and the Castle Hill RSL ClubGrants program.



CommBank
Staff Foundation

CH
RSL
RG

- Castle Hill RSL Group -



SIBWORKS

"When I had heard about Fit Kidz Foundation running the Sibworks program, I couldn't email my expression of interest quick enough! My youngest daughter struggles with having an older sister with special needs and I wasn't sure how best to help her navigate these challenges. My daughter was at first apprehensive attending the program until I explained that there were going to be children all like her. At the first day pick up she was so eager to tell me all about her day. She was telling me about the friends she had made and all about their siblings. It helped her to understand that we aren't the only ones."

"The Fit Kidz Foundation facilitators were lovely and communicated to me on pick up, how things went. The booklet that was provided is a useful tool to look back on or where there are moments of challenges. I feel very lucky to have had my daughter on this program. I am grateful that FKF were able to see a need in our community and make it happen."

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Inflatable World Events

Throughout 2023 we hosted a number of family community events exclusively for our past and present families of the Fit Kidz Foundation. In the April, July and September school holidays we exclusively hired Inflatable World Dural. We had over 260 attendees across these family events coming together to connect in a safe and inclusive environment.

Family Christmas Party

In December 2023, we hosted our Family Christmas Party at Crocs Rouse Hill with over 160 guests in attendance. The space was booked exclusively which allowed our families to connect with one another and celebrate the year that was. We had a craft room, a sensory breakout space, and a very special visit from Santa.

Many of our families can find attending community activities overwhelming. Through our family community events and our Family Christmas Party we aim to provide an opportunity where our families can enjoy themselves, connect with one another and feel supported in our community.

Inclusion in the community

Mayor's Christmas Party

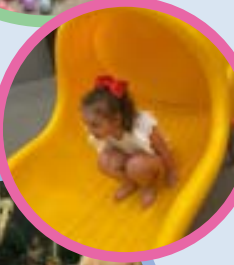
On the first Saturday in December, The Hills Shire Council and Mayor, Dr Peter Gangemi, hosted the Mayor's Christmas Party at Bella Vista Farm. This year was the first year with a 'Sensory Sensitive Session' with tickets capped, music on the rides turned down, and the inclusion of our Fit Kidz Foundation breakout space. The Sensory Sensitive Session allowed for many families in our community to access an event that they otherwise would not have attended due to sensory overstimulation, crowds or fear of safety. This is just the first of many initiatives that The Hills Shire Council is undertaking to ensure a more inclusive community for Hills District residents.

Glenhaven Carols

The Fit Kidz Foundation attended Glenhaven Carols at Glenhaven Oval in December 2023 for the first time. The Fit Kidz Foundation's sensory breakout space was available throughout the event for those who require it. During the event we had a number of children access the space and met so many beautiful families.



"Thank you so much for the event! Both my boys had a great time. In the car on the way home Ben told me, 'I feel happy, Mum'. He has been learning to communicate feelings but does not do so often, so this was really special. Thank you!"



"Thank you for providing this hour to kids with special needs. My 4 yr old son has ADHD and autism. For that hour we were able to access rides quickly and there was only a small crowd. It was the first time he was able to get his face painted as normally there are huge waiting times at other events and he simply can't wait that long still. Everything was perfect and we had an absolute ball."



FUNDRAISING

overview

Ladies Night - Safari Soiree

In April we hosted our Annual Ladies Night fundraising event. This year it was all about Safari Soiree, and the outfits stood true to the theme.

We are very grateful to everyone who supported the event, including our major supporters, Two Birds One Loan, families and friends who donated prizes, guests on the night, community members who participated in the online raffle, our committee, and team of volunteers. With all of this incredible support we raised \$10,000.

Charity Golf Day

In May 2023 we hosted our 6th Annual Charity Golf Day at Riverside Oaks. Our Golf Day was supported by the major sponsors of the event, Guardian Realty. We had a number of local businesses come on board as hole sponsors and had 128 players join us on the day. With thanks to everyone who supported our Golf Day, joined us on the day and our parent committee, we raised just over \$35,000.

Annual Spring Ball

We held our Annual Spring Ball in November 2023 at the Castle Hill RSL where we were joined by over 200 guests who all enjoyed a night of incredible food, drinks and plenty of dancing. We were joined for the first time by Angie Asimus, who acted as MC on the evening, and Brown Sugar, who had everyone up on their feet at the end of the night. Guests were amazed by the creative talents of Brad Blaze, who impressed with his speed painting. We had a number of fundraising efforts on the evening including bingo boards, raffles, balloon prizes, silent and live auctions, and our \$10,000 Dream Holiday Raffle was back for the second year. The night would not have been possible without our event sponsors: Blue Group Projects, Guardian Realty, Hills Self Storage, and WPH Sports Club. It is thanks to everyone who attended on the evening, participated in our online raffle, donated, and volunteered that we were able to raise just over \$40,000.



Grants

We were very fortunate to receive a number of grants throughout 2023. Our Stronger Together Conference was proudly funded by The Hills Shire Council Community Grant, the CommBank Staff Foundation Community Grant, Bankstown Sports Club Grant and the Amazon Give2Asia Grant.

We also received grants for new projects throughout the year including the SibWorks Program supported by the CommBank Staff Foundation and the Castle Hill RSL Club Grant, and the Community Building Partnerships Grant from the NSW Government towards specific sensory resources for the centre.

These grants will allow us to continue to host our Stronger Together Conference, continue the delivery of our SibWorks Program, host ongoing family community events, attend community events with our roaming sensory breakout space, and provide specific resources for our service.

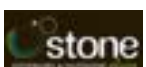


Community Donations

In 2023 we received over \$30,000 in donations from our community partners, supporters and the Fit Kidz Early Learning Centres. Every donation and act of generosity from our community helps support the early intervention journey of local children and their families. We are extremely grateful for this support from our community partners.

Committee

Our Fit Kidz Foundation parent committee forms an integral part of the fundraising efforts that the Foundation undertakes throughout the year. Without this committee a lot of the work that goes into our events would not be possible. We would like to thank each and every member of our committee who puts in their time and effort into making our events possible.



OUR TEAM



TOTAL 31 STAFF

TEAM HIGHLIGHT *Reimagine Conference*

In November 2023, Ellen, Anwyn and Sophie had the opportunity to attend the Reimagine Conference in Brisbane. They were featured presenters discussing collaboration in an early intervention service that implements a transdisciplinary approach. Ellen was also able to sit down with Steve Peereboom, a father to three beautiful boys who all have autism, and speak about the journey from a father's perspective.

Our Stronger Together Conference was also nominated in the Social Impact category at the Reimagine Conference Dinner which was a big honour to be nominated in only the second year.



FINANCIAL Summary

Financial reports were audited by Lamb, Low and Partners Pty Ltd and are available by request from Fit Kidz Foundation and have been lodged with the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission.

Where the money comes from

Income (TOTAL) \$1,547,636.72

- 13.4% Fundraising & Donations
- 0.6% Government Grants
- 83.0% Supports & Services
- 3.0% Community Projects

Where the money goes

Expenses (TOTAL) \$1,759,796.57

- 84.7% Employee Costs
- 5.2% Admin & Occupancy
- 2.4% Service Delivery Costs
- 5.7% Fundraising Costs
- 2.0% Community Projects

OUR IMPACT in 2023

Family Community Events:

- Exclusive **Inflatable World**, April (97 children, parents / carers)
- Exclusive **Inflatable World**, July (88 children, parents / carers)
- Exclusive **Inflatable World**, October (73 children, parents / carers)
- Exclusive **Christmas Party**, December (165 children, parents / carers)

5,580 hours of therapy including:

- Speech Therapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Positive Behaviour Support
- Child & Family Therapy
- Therapy Assistant

109 hours of other services:

- Communication/AAC device user groups
- Specialist feeding program
- Early speech screening programs

161 hours of capacity building support provided to 9 local early childhood education and care (ECEC) services.

250 local parents/carers and 40 local services attended our **Stronger Together** conference in August.

THE FAMILIES

231 hours of SibWorks was provided to 11 siblings.

55 parents/carers accessed our parent connection groups.

64 hours of parent workshops provided.

10 families accessed our Toileting workshop series.

THE CHILDREN

182 children supported

8,369 hours of group programs including:

- Andy Bear Club
- Supported play groups
- School-age groups
- Transition to school intensive programs
- School holiday programs

THE COMMUNITY

3 University students were provided with a community-based placement

100 local children accessed the **Sensory Sensitive Session** at the Mayor's Christmas Party in December

Hosted our **sensory breakout space** at 2 local community events.



SUPPORT US

How you can help

Donations

Whether you make a once-off cash donation, regular donations or donate a product or service towards a prize for a fundraising event, all donations are greatly appreciated to assist us to support our subsidised Early Intervention Group Programs.

[DONATE HERE](#)

Sponsor an Event

Throughout the year we seek individuals or businesses to sponsor our major fundraising events, including Ladies Night, our Golf Day, and the Spring Ball. You can also choose to sponsor a family community access event which enables families to connect and children to play in a safe and inclusive environment. If you would like to sponsor an event, please contact us to learn more!

Volunteer with us

We often ask for volunteers to help with fundraising or community events. From wrapping raffle items or transporting items to and from an event, there is a volunteer role to suit everyone.



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