



AUTISM
Cook Islands

STRATEGIC PLAN ***2020-2023***



DEFINITION OF AUTISM

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental disorder

It is recognized that autism is a spectrum, meaning that everyone has unique strengths and challenges.

People with autism have strengths and difficulties in different areas which affect their lives differently. No two people on the spectrum are alike. However, for someone to be diagnosed with autism, they will have a difficulty or delay in two main areas of functioning:

- 1. Communication and social interaction**
- 2. Restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior**

It's important to remember that abilities can change over time. They may have the ability to complete a task in one situation, but not in a new environment. This is true for people with autism who usually find change challenging.

WHAT IS AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition. While each person with ASD experiences autism in a different way, some common aspects include:



Challenges with communicating and interacting with others



Experiencing the world and those around them in a different way



A preference for clear communication about social expectations



Repetitive and different behaviours, moving their bodies in different ways



Having a strong interest in a particular topic or subject



A need for structure and routine, rather than change



KIA ORANA!

It is my pleasure to share with you;

AUTISM COOK ISLANDS, STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE PERIOD 2020 TO 2023

What initially started as a couple of families looking for help and moral support for coping with their children with Autism, is now an established community organization reaching over forty families who are affected by Autism. Our network will continue to grow as we become aware of others.

In 2018 Autism Cook Islands conducted a needs assessment analysis, the needs highlighted were:

- communication
- language
- teachers and teacher aide training or support
- diagnosis
- resources
- awareness

This is where we have focused our efforts. Especially with young children with Autism as we understand how vital early intervention is for a person with Autism. Providing the best chance of dealing with developmental issues that affect early learning and every-day living. In turn providing a good foundation for continued learning and growth in later years.

At the end of this strategic planning period, ACI will be celebrating its seventh birthday. We are truly humbled by the overwhelming support from local businesses and community to date. Our success is truly a collaboration of partners from all sectors. We look forward to continuing to nurture valuable partnerships and build new relationships to enable us to deliver our strategic plan effectively.

We are more committed than ever to creatively working together to deliver services of real value to our members and community.

Through all this, Autism Cook Islands is committed to fulfill our vision to bring out the best, and empower persons who have Autism and their families, enabling them to live enriched, meaningful and fulfilling lives.

Kia Manuia

Gloria Rarere-Tinirau

President | Autism Cook Islands





OUR VISION

We envision individuals and their families living with Autism in the Cook Islands, able to maximize their quality of life. They will be accepted, respected and treated with the highest level of dignity, and live in a society in which their talents and skills are appreciated and valued.

OUR MISSION

To bring out the best and improve the lives of those living with Autism in the Cook Islands, enabling and empowering them to live meaningful and fulfilling lives

OUR VALUES

Based on our mission: to bring out the best and improve the lives of those living with Autism in the Cook Islands our values reflect our guiding principles of:

COLLABORATION

Working in collaboration, seek to establish and strengthen effective partnerships in key areas.

EXCELLENCE

Strive for excellence in all our activities, programmes and service delivery.

INNOVATION

Utilize innovative strategies adopted as best practices across overseas disability communities

SUSTAINABILITY

Support the collection of data and evidence-based analysis to create sustainable improvements

EMPOWERMENT

Enabling and empowering individuals, their families and support workers.

STEWARDSHIP

Demonstrating responsible financial management, acting with integrity and in the best interest of those we serve



LOOKING BACK AT OUR ACHIEVEMENTS 2017 TO 2019

AUTISM AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Autism Cook Islands launched Autism Awareness Month in April 2017, it has been held annually in April each year, coinciding with World Autism Awareness Day observed by the United Nations. ACI wanted to use the opportunity to focus on educating and building community understanding of Autism. At this time Autism was “new” here in the Cook islands so we frontloaded the first year with a jam-packed month of activity. It was extremely successful with support from all tiers of the community. Here are a few examples of what we did below;

- Blue Day fundraiser - encouraging the public to wear blue to show their support and make a gold coin donation for Autism Awareness in the Cook Islands. Add some statistics of how much support we've got, maybe how it's grown in support, what things groups have done to support
- Blue Day colouring competition for primary schools - this project focused on children from Grade one (1) to Grade six (6), with prizes for each age category. This is a fun way to teach young kids about Autism
- Presentations to schools, colleges, business and community groups on Rarotonga, looking at how people who have autism see the world differently.
- Presentations to private groups and individuals on Rarotonga
- Regular posts on Social media (Facebook, Rarotonga community pages, newspaper, radio and television)
- Blue themed Zumba fundraiser, encouraging the community to have fun and wear blue to support Autism awareness, also an opportunity for those who attended to ask questions etc.
- Light it Up Blue fun family event - this event closed off the month with everything blue, held at the National Auditorium, with support from Rotaract and the ACI executive committee offered fun games around the different sensory challenges of an autistic person, music, lights, balloons and food stalls. A hugely successful night with a packed-out crowd.

Throughout the month-long campaign, we were fortunate to partner up with various local business, banks, government agencies, colleges and primary schools. Our awareness campaign has become a true collaboration of partners from all sectors of our community.

Since then ACI has been committed to hold annual awareness campaigns. In 2018 we were able to share our message in the Pa Enua, with generous support from Air Rarotonga. We will continue to grow our campaign and ensure there is a continued message of awareness in our community. In 2020, due to COVID-19, we were unable to go ahead with our community plans. We have delayed this till later in the year. However, we will increase promotion of our message via appropriate social media platforms.



COMMUNICATION PROJECT

This project involved the employment of a full-time speech therapist by Autism Cook Islands. Because of the delay in funding approvals, this resulted in only being able to employ her for a period of four months.

However, we were determined to complete this much needed pilot project. At the end, the project was extremely successful and provided much-needed statistics to prove how much we are in need of this type of support on Rarotonga and the Pa Enea. It also proved the value of a full holistic approach to empower and provide sustainability of the programme.

Autism Cook Islands received funding for this project from UNESCO, and we also partnered with local businesses and Cook Islands Government Partners; Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Pa Enea Island Governments, primary schools and colleges on Rarotonga, Aitutaki and Mangaia.

The project provided the following supports:

- Professional development training for principals, teachers and teacher aides
- One hundred and One (101) sessions with families to talk about their child, to understand what autism means to them and how to use their strengths to connect with the child and to teach them new things. Family sessions ranged from addressing issues such as toilet training, sleep, learning new words, using visuals, planning a holiday, playing games with siblings through to leaving college and starting work
- Twenty-six (26) Individualized Education Plans (full holistic approach including families, teaching teams and IE advisors) were produced.
- Twenty-seven (27) multidisciplinary assessments (including pre and post visits to families and schools)
- Ten (10) days in the Pa Enea working with schools, families and communities.
- Fifteen (15) meetings with stakeholders (including Island council/local government, Ministry of Health, tertiary education provider, presenting at the ECE teachers' network, and speaking at the celebration of the International Day of Disabled Persons at the Mangaia Resource Centre
- Support to assessment and diagnosis team
- Creation of resources relevant for use in Cook Island schools and colleges
- Genuine statistics to inform focus areas

Source: Project Completion report, Autism Cook Islands Communication Project. February 2020.

AUTISM ASSESSMENT AND DIAGNOSIS PROJECT

Autism Cook Islands was able to secure a fully qualified team of specialists from New Zealand to travel to Rarotonga to perform comprehensive assessments and diagnosis. This project ran in tandem with the communication project and worked perfectly. Having a full-time speech therapist on island prior and after the team came and left meant that the preparation work to develop a list of children that would require diagnosis was completed thoroughly and efficiently and any follow up was completed as well. The project was also able to send the diagnosis team to Aitutaki for a day, courtesy of our friends from Air Rarotonga. We were also able to ensure families were prepared for the assessment team providing information on what to expect and how to prepare their child for the assessment. This project will undertake further assessments



via virtual meetings with families later in the year.

Autism Cook Islands worked alongside relevant sponsors and partners, Cook Islands Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Internal Affairs, primary schools and colleges both on Rarotonga, Aitutaki and Mangaia. Funding for this project was provided by Cook Islands Government Ministry of Internal Affairs, Social Impact Fund (SIF).

The project was able to achieve the following outcomes:

- Able to reach schools in the Pa Enea (outer islands)
- Complete twenty-seven (27) multidisciplinary assessments, seven (7) of these were diagnosed with ASD plus other conditions and twenty (20) diagnosed with ASD. One (1) child was from the Pa Enea Island of Mangaia.
- Relationships with key government agencies, children, their families, principals, teachers and support workers
- Genuine statistics to inform focus areas

Source: Six monthly progress report, Autism Cook Islands Assessment and Diagnosis Project. February 2020

OTHER PROJECTS

- Continue to build and stock an appropriate resource library available to families, teachers, teacher aides and the public.
- Regular networking events for members and their families.
- Regular visits to new families, who need support getting started, etc.
- Provision of guidance and support when required to Ministry of Education on risks, incidents, supports, training, etc





LOOKING FORWARD >>

OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES

2020 TO 2023

Autism Cook Islands' objectives are aligned to the Cook Islands Disability Inclusive Development Policy and Action Plan 2014-2019 and the Cook Islands

Te Kaveinga Nui, National Sustainable Development Plan (NSDP) 2016-2020 goals:



Goal 1 Improve welfare, reduce inequity and economic hardship

Support



Goal 7 Improve health and promote healthy lifestyle

Awareness



Goal 8 Ensure inclusive and equitable quality of education and promote life-long learning opportunities

Build capacity



Goal 9 Accelerate gender equality, empower all women and girls, and advance the rights of youth, the elderly and disabled

Influence.



OUR PRIORITIES

2020 TO 2023



PRIORITY 1: SUPPORT

PROVIDE PASTORAL CARE, NETWORKING AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM



PRIORITY 2: AWARENESS

FACILITATE AND RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS OF AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER (ASD)



PRIORITY 3: BUILD CAPACITY:

BUILD A NETWORK OF CAPABLE PROFESSIONALS AVAILABLE TO PROVIDE SUPPORT FOR PERSONS WITH ASD, THEIR FAMILIES, CAREGIVERS AND EDUCATION PROVIDERS



PRIORITY 4: INFLUENCE

ADVOCATE AND INFLUENCE DECISIONS WITHIN INSTITUTIONS AND THROUGH POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SECTORS FOR PERSONS WITH ASD, THEIR FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS





PRIORITY 1: SUPPORT

Provide pastoral care, networking and support for families of children with Autism

KEY OBJECTIVES - WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- **Families and Support workers are empowered and understand their role**
- **Families have access to the financial and educational supports needed**
- **Individuals with autism are contributing and participating in the to the wider community**

STRATEGY- HOW WE WILL EXECUTE

- Provide understanding of financial supports available through Cook Islands Ministry of Internal Affairs and assist families with sourcing this support.
- Provide support to encourage children with autism to join community social groups and to enable them to foster new relationships.
- Continue to hold regular ACI networking events
- Develop and implement a Transition from College to Employment programme in partnership with Cook Islands Ministry of Education and local businesses.
- Establish and implement a Keep Safe program in schools for adolescent children with Autism\
- Develop and produce resources and maintain a resource library for families, teachers and support workers to access with helpful books, and teaching resources
- Continue to encourage and promote the attendance of our members to international training, workshops and seminars.



PRIORITY 2: AWARENESS

***Facilitate and raise public awareness of
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)***

KEY OBJECTIVES - WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- **Increased knowledge, understanding, and acceptance of ASD in our community**
- **Increased awareness in schools, workplace and community**

STRATEGY- HOW WE WILL EXECUTE

- Regularly communicate with stakeholders, providing progress updates, and sharing knowledge
- Develop and implement an annual awareness calendar of events
- Develop Autism Cook Islands website as a central resource and communication tool
- Provide autism awareness workshops for private sector, Government agencies, schools and community groups.
- Commit to hosting annual Awareness month
- Develop and produce an awareness resource pack for outreach programmes.





PRIORITY 3: BUILD CAPACITY:

Build a network of capable professionals available to provide support for persons with ASD, their families, caregivers and education providers

KEY OBJECTIVES - WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- ***Having permanent specialists employed by Autism Cook Islands***
- ***Established international network of professionals that we can draw on for virtual support***
- ***Hosting training workshops in the Cook Islands working with professionals***

STRATEGY- HOW WE WILL EXECUTE

- Partner with established international organizations to provide training to families and schools
- Participate in International Conferences, workshops and training.
- Extend specialist support to be accessible to Pa Enuu, which may include virtual communication options.
- Continue the Communication Project in partnership with Ministry of Education
- Continue Assessment and Diagnosis programme in partnership with Cook Islands Ministry of Health.



PRIORITY 4: INFLUENCE

Advocate and influence decisions within institutions and through political, economic and social sectors for persons with ASD, their families and caregivers

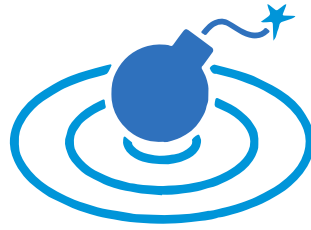
KEY OBJECTIVES - WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- **Actively involved in development of national policies**
- **Autism Cook Islands is recognized as a credible and authoritative voice on issues for those with Autism**
- **Government will include ongoing specialist assistance in their annual budget**

STRATEGY- HOW WE WILL EXECUTE

- Proactively participate in forums, advisory and working groups to develop policy or responses that will affect the Autism community
- Be represented and actively involved in the Cook Islands National Disability Council.
- Establish Memorandums of Understanding with key government agencies
- Advocate for continued support and appropriate training for Teachers and Teacher Aides who work with children with Autism.
- Advocate for the mandatory use of an Inclusive Education Plan (IEP) for all children with Autism in all schools in the Cook Islands.
- Host a Pacific Regional Conference for Autism in the Cook Islands.





RISK ANALYSIS

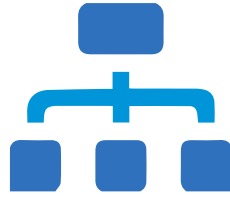
STRENGTHS | GO - PASSIONATE AND ENGAGED EXECUTIVE TEAM

WEAKNESSES | INVEST - SEEK STAFF AND A PERMANENT BASE

OPPORTUNITIES | EXPLORE FUNDING OPTIONS AND COLLABORATION WITH GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

THREATS | MINIMISE BAD PRESS, LOSS OF GOOD REPUTATION AND PROGRESS/MOMENTUM

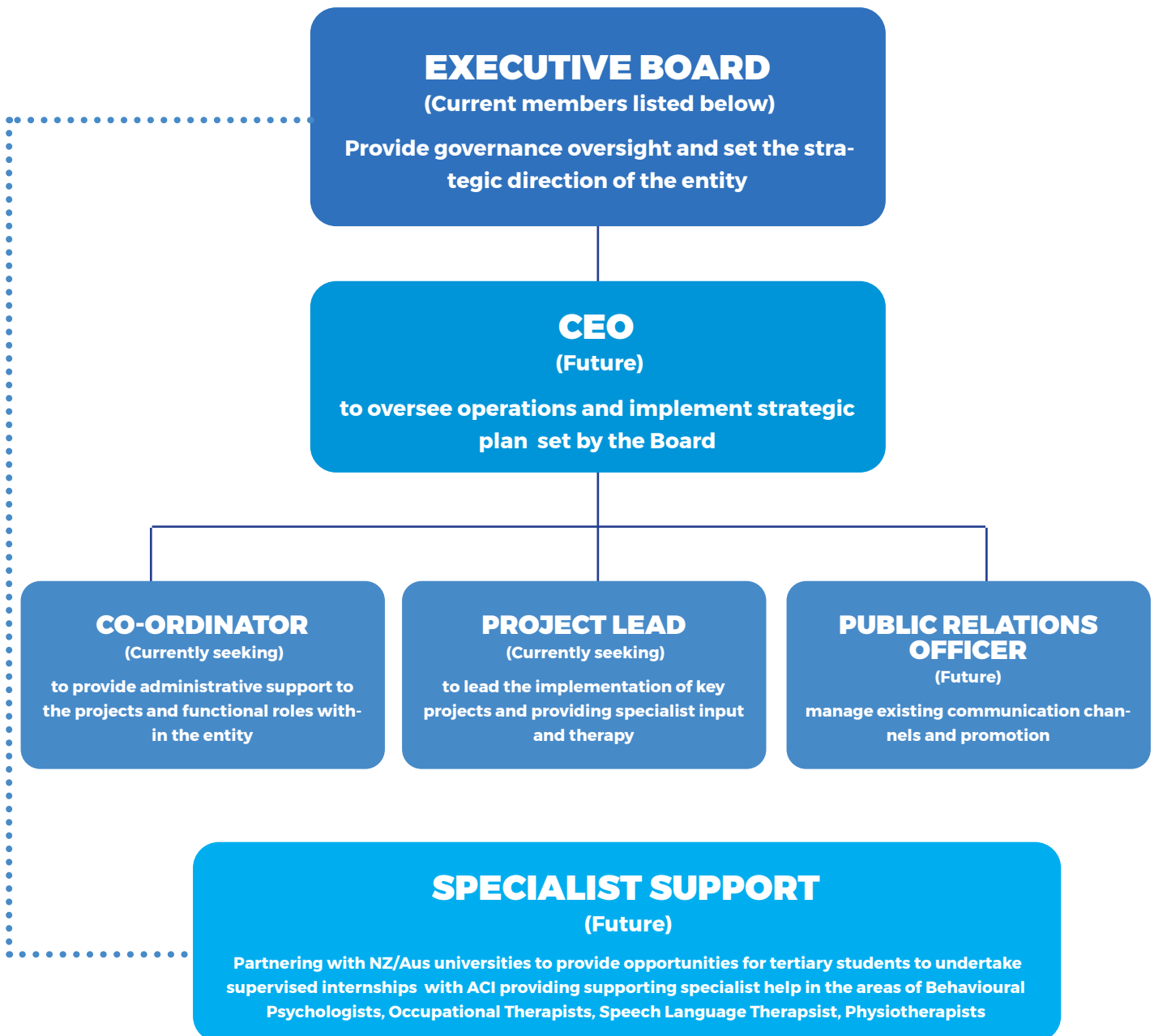
Risk Identified	Controls in place	Who is responsible
Permanent base	Seeking office space	ACI Executive
Staff to implement strategy	Looking at appropriate mix and funding for this.	ACI Executive
Grant funding not obtained	Consistently seek appropriate avenues for funding including international sources if suitable.	ACI Executive
Proper management of donations	Donations are receipted and deposited into ACI bank account. Accounted for in annual reports	Treasurer
Bad press re: utilization of funds	Continue to maintain proper internal control process. Appropriate records are available when required.	Treasurer
Keep community updated on progress	Ensure regular updates are completed and loaded to appropriate media platforms, monthly, quarterly or bi-annually.	ACI Media team and appropriate executive members.
Project updates are available prior to due dates.	Ensure all project completion reporting are completed prior to becoming due. Appropriate reports are completed and signed off by executive members.	ACI Executive
Families are missed or excluded	Ensure list of members and non- members (diagnosis confirmed) are updated regularly. Including phone, mobile numbers and emails. Ensure everyone on the list is contacted regularly to ensure no one is missed or excluded.	ACI Executive



ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

As ACI develops we will need to build the appropriate infrastructure to be able to sustain the growth and provide consistent excellent service.

Table below outlines the structure we envisage.



AUTISM COOK ISLANDS EXECUTIVE: CURRENT 2020

GLORIA RARERE TINIRAU | *President*

TONY FE'AO | *Vice President*

KATRINA MATHESON | *Secretary*

SIMONE FE'AO | *Treasurer.*

LYSIA STRINGER | *Committee member*

NICOLE BROWN | *Committee member*

MICHAEL PONGA | *Committee member*



