



**abacus**  
achieving with autism

BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
**INFORMATION PACK**

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# ABOUT ABACUS

Abacus Learning Centre opened as a registered charity in 2008 to provide a centre-based autism service offering ABA therapy programs.

Over the last 14 years, many families have travelled from all-over Melbourne to access crucial early intervention for their children and have experienced the benefits of Abacus ABA, which is based on extensive clinical experience and research.

The team focus on improving a child's ability to effectively learn in social and educational settings. Ensuring every child has fun and is motivated is a key element of each one of the tailored programs that meets the needs of both the individual student and their families.

The introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) has seen demand for autism services grow considerably over the last few years and to help meet this demand, the Board would like to build on the established reputation of the centre and grow the organisation sustainably.

Working with the CEO, the volunteer Directors help to drive the strategic objectives and are ambassadors for Abacus. Each Director brings a unique skillset and through their networks they create opportunities that help ensure our for-purpose organisation has both community and philanthropic support.

Each member of the Board has an important role to play and is primarily responsible for governing, overseeing the affairs of, and making important decisions for the organisation and its members.

The current Directors hope you will consider joining the Abacus Board, bringing your knowledge and leadership skills to our community and helping us continue to achieve with autism.

## OUR MISSION



Helping autistic people connect, communicate and learn.

## OUR VISION



Ensuring all families are provided with the highest quality autism services through tailored programs, community partnerships and research.

# OUR VALUES

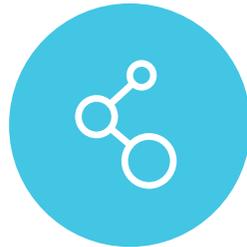
## CREATIVE



turning new and  
imaginative  
ideas into reality

- Always exploring what's possible
- Looking to continuously improve
- Passionate and reflective

## CONNECTED



everyone  
belongs

- Caring, kind, respectful and collaborative
- Understand that together we make a difference
- Connecting to place, space and people

## PLAYFUL



play with  
purpose

- Finding things to celebrate about others
- Enjoying your work and play
- Showing positive energy and a can do attitude

## THRIVING



feeling good and  
functioning well

- Always learning
- Seeing people's strengths and appreciating difference
- Focussed on wellbeing

# OUR HISTORY

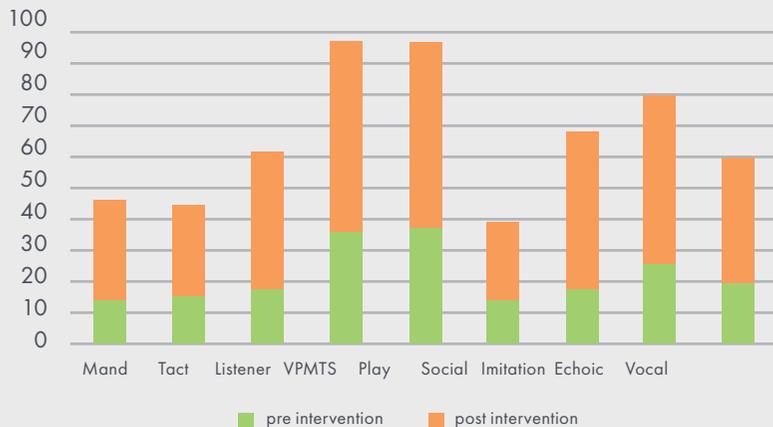
A small group of parents and supporters shared an inspired dream to provide centre-based Early Intensive Behaviour Intervention (EIBI) for autistic children and their families.

The benefits of providing crucial therapy at a young age are based on extensive clinical experience and research.

Since its inception, Abacus has helped over 600 families improve their child's ability to more effectively learn in social and educational settings.

## STUDENT SKILL ACQUISITION

Criteria based assessment tool VB MAPP (Verbal Behaviour Milestones Assessment and Placement Program)



**OVER 90%**  
OF STUDENTS  
TRANSITION TO  
MAINSTREAM  
SCHOOL

## 2008

Founding year

Centre-based ABA services commence in Mornington

## 2011

Abacus moves to Victoria Street, Hastings

The Hon. Greg Hunt MP undertakes a 500km Walk for Autism to raise funds for Abacus

Inaugural Abacus family participation in the Run Melbourne fundraiser

## 2012

Name change from Mornington Peninsula Autism School Ltd to Abacus Learning Centre Ltd



## 2013

Inaugural 'Achieving with Autism'  
Gala Dinner fundraiser

## 2014

In-school ABA program commences

## 2015

The Hon. Greg Hunt MP second  
500km Walk for Autism helping  
raise funds for Abacus

## 2016

Abacus moves to High Street  
site at Western Port Secondary  
College

Awarded CareNavigator NDIS  
Provider of the Year

Introduction of Educator Workshops

## 2017

Awarded CareNavigator  
Victorian NDIS Provider of  
the Year

Count on Abacus Tutoring  
Support program commences



## 2019

The Hon. Greg Hunt MP announces the  
Australian Government commitment  
of \$1.2 million to help construct a  
purpose-built facility

NDIS registered for Therapeutic  
Supports

Abacus opens Church Street site

Collaboration with the Turner Institute for  
Brain and Mental Health to secure \$2.5  
million in funding for Autism research

Victorian Government supports long-term  
lease for Abacus at Western Port Secondary  
College

## 2018

10 Year Anniversary

Partnered Design Studio with RMIT  
University

Lifetime Patron Award presented  
to the Hon. Greg Hunt MP at third  
500km Walk for Autism

Abacus clients begin to receive  
NDIS Funding

## 2020

NDIS Quality and Safeguarding  
Audit (Stage 1 & 2) completed

Transition to COVID-safe  
operations

Staff registered for Board  
Certificate Behaviour Analyst  
(BCBA) Certification



## 2021

Continuation of services under COVID  
restrictions

NDIS registered for Early Childhood  
Supports

Finalisation of development plans for a  
purpose-built centre

## 2022

Purpose-built centre construction  
completed



# 2023 & BEYOND

Abacus is the epitome of a grass roots organisation that was built for the people, by the people.

As a for-purpose organisation we appreciate everyone who has, and continues to, donate both time and funds to our organisation. Abacus certainly wouldn't be where it is today, without their belief and contribution to the wellbeing of young autistic people.

This year we have been able to enrol many more students into our current centres and with our new centre recently opening we will be expanding our service to support another 30 young autistic people through our early intervention program for 2-6 year olds and the Count on Abacus program for Primary School aged students.

Our future plans are to expand into surrounding regions, such as the City of Casey, and continue helping many more families access our services.

## Our Community

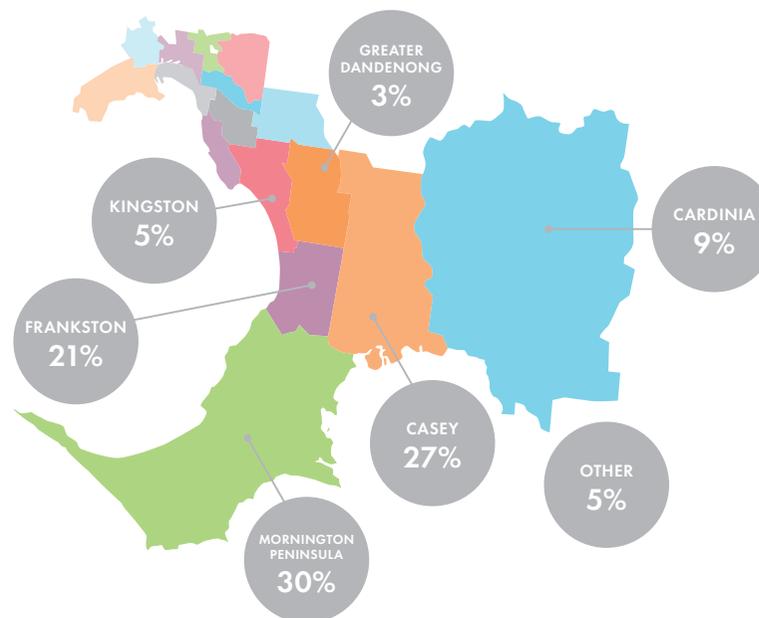
Abacus Learning Centre is located 75km south of Melbourne CBD, in Hastings on the Mornington Peninsula, known for its village atmosphere, bay beaches, wineries restaurants and fresh farm-gate produce.

Families come from a range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. All services and supports are provided in a flexible manner to ensure all cultural considerations, including ethnicity and language, are incorporated into planning and programming.

As a registered charity, the centre relies on the efforts of staff, families, friends and supporters in raising funds and securing donations. Businesses also contribute significant in-kind support, this ongoing kindness is invaluable and contributes to the sense of community that has developed at Abacus.

### STUDENT ENROLMENTS BY LOCALITY

Source: Abacus Enrolment Data, August 2018



## Our Staff

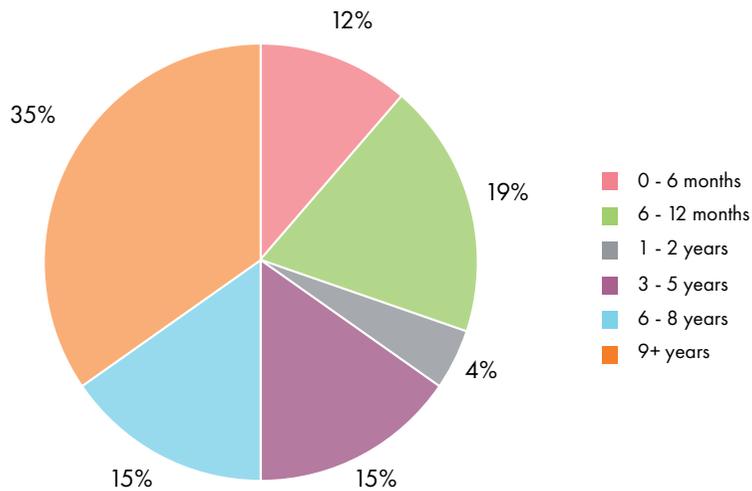
Delivered by inspirational and dedicated staff, Abacus programs consistently deliver best practice therapy services to its clients, making a profound impact on the lives of children with autism, their families and the wider community.

People are at the heart of what we do, and we are committed to supporting and celebrating our talented and compassionate Team Members.

A recent organisational review found that our staff love coming to work, feel valued, empowered, and continue to feel a part of something special.

### LENGTH OF EMPLOYMENT

Source: Abacus Employee Feedback Survey, May 2021



## What our Team Members say...



"The kids laughter and energy when we learn and play together is so much fun"  
*Shanae*

### Playful



"I enjoy seeing the kids from where they start through to thriving in school"  
*Daniel*

### Thriving



"Everyone is so welcoming at Abacus, you can be yourself and work to your strengths"  
*Sarah*

### Connected



"I have learnt so much since joining the Abacus team. The training, coaching and creative approach makes it a vibrant place to work"  
*Liz*

### Creative

# STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS



Abacus aims to harness the immense potential in our organisation to make a positive and widespread impact on the lives of autistic people.

## Objectives

Help more people on the autism spectrum reach their full potential

.....

Ensure our financial and organisational sustainability into the future

.....

Enhance organisational capability to continue to deliver high quality services

## Initiatives / Activities

- Grow our client base to serve a greater proportion of the Victorian community
- Expand the range of services provided to meet the diverse needs of autistic people
- Engage in activities that promote recognition with industry, government and our target market

## Measures

- Client numbers (total) per annum
- Expansion in online service offerings
- Baseline client satisfaction results
- Baseline complaints data
- Service quality data
- Individual therapy outcome data

## Success / Outcomes

- Growth in client numbers and referrals year-on-year
- Growth in offering either geographically or service types
- Reduction in time spent on waiting lists
- Successful planned transitions to school
- Establish partnerships with universities on thought leadership
- Explore corporate partnerships
- Evaluate branding and collateral to engage with key stakeholders

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- Build a new centre in the South East
  - Reduced dependency on donations and tied funding
  - Develop new funding sources not tied to service delivery
  - Implement and improve systems to support efficiencies and service provision

- Track/measure performance to budget
- Retained earnings
- Asset/liabilities
- Staff/student turnover
- Wages to therapy income
- Efficiency improvements
- Utilise Board risk appetite statement in decision making

- Performance to budget including profit growth
- Retained earnings
- Asset liabilities - improve current ratio
- Wages to therapy income - sustainable ratio
- New centre completed in 2022
- Improved operational efficiencies

- 
- Evaluate and further develop our ability to meet future challenges and opportunities
  - Optimise our staffing models for continued growth
  - Attract and retain high-calibre staff with necessary specialist skills to deliver objectives

- No. of accredited BCBA practitioners
- Baseline staff satisfaction surveys
- Independent assessments and feedback
- Continuous performance management

- Increased number of accredited staff
- High levels of staff retention and engagement
- Improved work practices and processes
- Scalable growth and planned succession

# BECOMING A VOLUNTEER DIRECTOR

Serving on a board is a wonderful way to support a cause that you care about.

Each year, individuals dedicate their time and expertise to shape the future of a for-purpose organisation through board service.

Individuals who serve on a board have the opportunity to develop and grow as leaders, cultivate new skills and expand their network.

The current Board of Directors is comprised of a collaborative group of talented professionals who are committed to helping Abacus achieve its mission.

Opportunities exist for people with the passion, skills, enthusiasm and time to make-a-difference to this amazing life-changing charity.



## Requirements of the Role

- Attend approximately six board meetings a year and one strategic planning day – and associated preparation including reading board papers
- Participate in teleconference meetings for management, financial reporting and general compliance issues if they arise between meetings
- Volunteer to provide support and expertise to the organisation and CEO where Director skills and expertise might be of assistance
- Help promote the organisation to key stakeholders at fundraisers, networking opportunities and other related events
- Set, promote and monitor the tone of the organisation's culture, strategy and direction
- Read and understand the Abacus Constitution, Code of Conduct and Child Safe & Vulnerable Persons Policy
- Provide a valid Director ID, Working with Children Check (WWCC) and complete a Responsible Persons' Declaration and NDIS Worker Screening Check prior to being appointed to the Abacus Board of Directors
- Disclose any potential conflict of interest by acknowledging likely conflicts (in writing) and withdrawing from any related discussion or decisions, (and ensuring these steps are noted in the minutes of the meeting)
- Be honest, act in good faith and do not use their role or information obtained as a Board member dishonestly.



## Competencies / Skills

- Knowledge of a director's responsibilities – includes an understanding of the role as well as the legal, ethical and financial responsibilities
- Strategic expertise – the ability to review strategy through constructive questioning and suggestion and contribute to the effective decision making of the board
- Accounting and finance – the ability to read and comprehend the company's accounts, financial material presented to the board, financial reporting requirements and some understanding of corporate finance
- Legal – the board's responsibility involves overseeing compliance with numerous laws as well as understanding the individual director's legal duties and responsibilities
- Risk Management – experience in managing areas of major risk management to the organisation
- Managing people and achieving change – experience in current management thinking on employment, branding, engagement, strategic vision and stakeholder communication
- Industry knowledge – experience in similar organisations or industries.



## Personal Attributes

- Meaningful engagement and personal commitment to our mission, vision and values – a director needs to be an active contributor with genuine interest in the organisation
- Work co-operatively - diverse viewpoints are actively encouraged, but it is important that board members know how to reach consensus on key issues and develop creative solutions
- Analytical and curious – a director must be able to function as an effective team member but also must have the curiosity to ask questions and persist in robust discussions with management and fellow board members where necessary
- Emotional intelligence – as well as self-awareness and self-management, a director needs to demonstrate empathy manifested through strong interpersonal skills. A director must work well in a group, listen, be tactful yet able to communicate a clear and succinct viewpoint
- Commercial judgement and instinct – a director needs to demonstrate good business instinct and acumen, and be able to assess complex information
- Integrity – fulfilling a director's duties and responsibilities, acting ethically and with appropriate independence
- Sense of humour - voluntary service is important but it should also be fun. The ability to use humour appropriately, especially in the boardroom, helps bring our members together. A laugh at the right times helps everyone take a balanced more objective approach to decision-making.

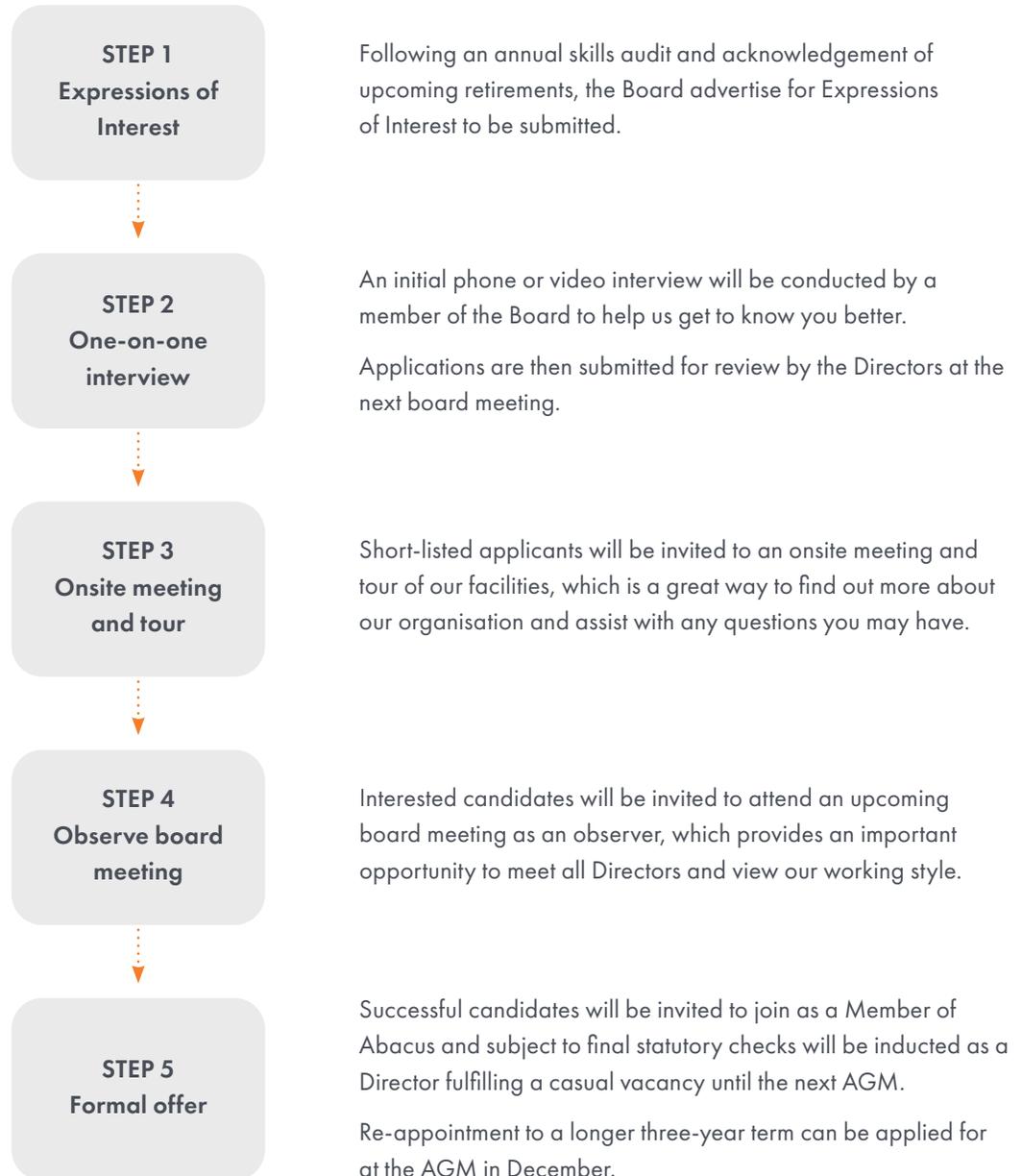
# SELECTION PROCESS

Boards who share common beliefs and qualities are able to lead creatively and effectively.

Ideally members of a board should:

- share a passion for and commitment to the organisation's mission
- are willing to roll up their sleeves when necessary to help
- have strong ties to their communities
- are diverse in age, gender, race, religion, occupation, skills, and background, and
- are willing to support efforts to raise money.

Our approach to board recruitment involves a series of meetings and conversations to help you understand what the board is looking for in a new member and how you can utilise your experience to help advance our social impact.





## How to Apply

### Expressions of Interest can be submitted by:

Responding to an advertisement on one of the board vacancy websites

OR

Submitting an EOI via our online form on the Abacus website

<https://www.abacuslearning.org.au/board-of-directors-contact-form/>

Your Expression of Interest should include:

- Why you are interested in this vacancy
- What skills/experience could you bring to the position
- Any service on previous/current Boards/Committees

A copy of your Board CV should also be attached to the application.



## Further Reading

### Abacus Website

<https://www.abacuslearning.org.au>

### ACNC Guide for Charity Board Members

<https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/guides/governance-for-good-acncs-guide-for-charity-board-members>

### Working with Children and NDIS Worker Screening Check

<https://www.service.vic.gov.au/find-services/work-and-volunteering>

### Director Identification Number

<https://www.abrs.gov.au/director-identification-number>



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Registered NDIS Provider