



# 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



# CONTENTS

About Us	1
Message from the CEO	2
Message from the Board Chair	3
Treasurer's Report	4-5
Year in Review	6-7
National Programs	8
Our Impact	9-10
Our People	
• Our Physiotherapists	11-12
• Our Board	13
• Our Partners	14
• Exercise Medicine Advisory Council	15
• Our Ambassadors	16
Acknowledgements	17

# ABOUT US

At Little Big Steps, we use physiotherapist-supported exercise medicine programs and technology (activity trackers & virtual reality) to get kids undergoing cancer treatment moving. Every small amount of movement counts and our programs give kids achievable goals and much needed support. The more we can keep kids moving, both in hospital and at home, the stronger they are at the end of treatment, and the easier it is for them to enjoy the activities they love.

## PURPOSE

To improve the health, wellbeing and recovery of children with cancer.

## VISION

Every child with cancer having the best chance of getting back to the things they love.

## MISSION

To provide physiotherapy support to every child with cancer in Australia.

## VALUES



### ACHIEVMENT

Continually celebrating the smallest of achievements by these extraordinary brave kids



### DETERMINATION

Having a clear purpose and drive to achieve maximum results and effectiveness



### FUN

Using interactive technology and gamification to bring enjoyment and reward to the health and wellbeing of kids with cancer



### UNITY

Working in collaboration with medical and allied health practitioners, charities, donors and the families and children affected by cancer

# A MESSAGE FROM THE CEO



It is with great pleasure that I present to you the 2024 Annual Report for Little Big Steps. Having just completed my third year leading this amazing charity, I'm thrilled to see the progress being made by all involved.

This has been the first year where we have started to see the benefits of our LBS National Physiotherapy Network. Our physiotherapists in Sydney, Adelaide and Perth have been meeting monthly as part of our network program to share best practice and support. At each site we now have at least 1.0FTE in total, often made up of several physiotherapists in shared roles. Together we work on combined grant applications, new ways to use technology such as virtual reality systems, and shared success stories.

Little Big Steps has also signed a partnership agreement with the University of Melbourne. Collectively, we will be supporting a physiotherapy PhD student to both provide clinical support in Melbourne and draw together potential research programs across the network. It is anticipated that a student enrolled late 2024.

Over the last twelve months we have received some exceptional support financially. Little Big Steps has won grants from Telethon 7 (1) and Tour de Cure (2) to support our programs in Adelaide and Perth. Most notably, our Foundation Partner, The Gillespie Family Foundation has committed to supporting a major component of the staff costs of Little Big Steps for the next five years, starting in 2024/25 financial year. This incredible injection of funds will hopefully secure the success of Little Big Steps to the end of the decade and beyond. We are deeply thankful for the ongoing support from the Gillespie Family Foundation.

At the end of 2023, in partnership with the Minderoo Foundation, we were the beneficiary of Baxter's Walk in Perth. In total, Minderoo committed \$120,000, Baxter's walk generated \$13,000 and the Perth Children's Hospital Foundation committed a further \$124,000 to our efforts at Perth Children's Hospital. Little Big Steps has also been working with the Campbell Foundation for several years. This year, with the trust being wound up, we were the recipient of a wonderful gift of \$115,000.

Above all I am immensely grateful to our team of physiotherapists who are helping children on a daily basis. We are continually receiving stories of success and recovery from the kids we serve – now numbering in excess of 250 per year. These kids are the core of what we do.

Over the next 12 months I hope to bring on new ambassadors for the charity, expand our corporate partners, return to the running of our Gala events, and seek Department of Health funding to support our programs.

It continues to be my privilege and pleasure to lead Little Big Steps as CEO and work with our inspiring Founders, Board Directors, staff and volunteers. I extend my immense gratitude to everyone who has supported Little Big Steps over the last 12 months.

**DR SHANE HUNTINGTON OAM**

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



# A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



It is with great pride that I present the 2024 Chairman's Report for Little Big Steps. This year has been one of remarkable growth, impact, and achievement. Reflecting on where we stood just a year ago, it is clear that our collective efforts have significantly advanced our mission to improve the health and well-being of children with cancer through physiotherapist-supported exercise programs.

**A Year of Building on Success** Last year, we set ambitious goals to expand our physiotherapy network across Australia, and I am thrilled to report that 2024 has been a year of significant strides in this regard. Our National Physiotherapy Network, which was only starting to take shape in 2023, has now fully developed into a powerful platform for knowledge sharing and collaboration, directly benefitting hundreds of children undergoing cancer treatment across Sydney, Perth, and Adelaide. This growth represents the realisation of plans laid out in previous years, where we envisioned a truly national footprint of programs, and now we are well on our way to achieving that.

In 2023, we proudly established long-term partnerships with key institutions and donors, and this year has only further solidified those relationships. The ongoing support from our Foundation Partner, the Gillespie Family Foundation, deserves special recognition. Their sustained and generous contributions continue to be the cornerstone of our ability to expand and enhance our programs. We are deeply grateful for their belief in our mission, which has been essential in securing the future of Little Big Steps and the children we serve.

**CEO's Exceptional Leadership** I also want to take this opportunity to recognise the outstanding leadership of our CEO, Dr. Shane Huntington. Since taking on the role in 2021, Shane has demonstrated exceptional vision, dedication, and strategic insight. Under his leadership, Little Big Steps has flourished, with key milestones such as the successful establishment of physiotherapy programs in major hospitals and the growth of our various strategic partnerships. His drive and commitment have positioned Little Big Steps as a leader in our field, across Australia. Shane's leadership has ensured that the organisation is not only financially sustainable but also primed for further innovation and impact.

**Looking to the Future** As we look ahead to 2025, we remain focused on expanding our reach even further. We are actively pursuing additional partnerships with hospitals and exploring new technologies to enhance our programs. We remain committed to our mission of ensuring that every child undergoing cancer treatment in Australia has access to the best physiotherapy support possible. While the challenges are great, our momentum from 2024 gives us confidence that we will continue to grow, evolve, and positively impact more lives in the years to come.

**Gratitude and Acknowledgements** I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to our donors, volunteers, and supporters. Your contributions—whether financial, in-kind, or through volunteer efforts—have been instrumental in our success. A special thank you to the Gillespie Family Foundation for their unwavering commitment to our cause. Your generosity is making an incredible difference in the lives of children and their families.

Finally, I want to acknowledge our entire team, from the board to our incredible physiotherapists. It is your dedication and hard work that allows Little Big Steps to continue its life-changing work. Together, we are making strides every day toward a brighter, healthier future for children with cancer.

**OMAR DE SILVA**

BOARD DIRECTOR AND CHAIR



# TREASURER'S REPORT

This year has marked a period of significant growth for Little Big Steps.

## Financial Performance Overview

LBS recorded a net surplus of \$109,026 for FY24. Total revenue increased to \$585,981, driven primarily by new grants and major donor contributions. The surplus achieved this year represents the organisation's balance of growth with sound fiscal discipline.

## Strengthened Financial Position

Our financial position at the close of FY24 is healthy:

- **Liquidity:** Cash at bank has grown to \$441,194 (FY23: \$209,866). Notwithstanding much of this is already committed, LBS is well-placed to meet its short-term obligations.
- **Income Received in Advance:** A substantial portion of liabilities, \$240,000, is income received with forward commitments. This funding provides assurance that LBS is equipped to deliver its multi-year commitments.

Whilst we have a strong foundation, the forward commitment of these funds underscores the importance of disciplined management on an ongoing basis.

## Expenditure and Strategic Investments

Operating expenses increased to \$476,955 (FY23: \$229,882), reflecting the scaling of operations.

- **Staffing:** Increased expenditure on salaries and wages represents our commitment to maintaining a high-performing, albeit lean team, to deliver on all of our growing commitments. We are grateful for all our executive does and their ongoing diligence in absolute efficiency.
- **Program Delivery:** The significant allocation to our various programmes, as well as technology, further represents our growing trajectory.

## Meeting Future Obligations

LBS is in a strong financial position to meet its near-term commitments, with adequate cash reserves and a clear strategy for managing income received in advance. However, as we continue to grow, the ability to maintain this level of financial health will depend on:

- **Sustained Revenue Growth:** Continued success in securing grants and donor support will be critical to meeting the increasing demands of program expansion.
- **Careful Cost Management:** Strategic prioritisation of expenditures will ensure that LBS remains agile and able to respond to emerging opportunities and challenges.

OMAR DE SILVA

BOARD DIRECTOR AND CHAIR (AND ACTING TREASURER)



# TREASURER'S REPORT

## **In Closing**

The financial position of Little Big Steps, supported by an operating surplus and sound cash reserves, provides reasonable assurance that the organisation will be able to meet its liabilities as and when they become due over the next 12 months (FY25). The growth in revenue and effective stewardship of income received in advance ensure stability for our core programs and the capacity to consider further investments in organisational growth. Financial sustainability remains a top priority for the Board as we look to the future.

Special thanks go to the founding members, Cindy-Lee Bakos and Cass Howcroft, for their continued engagement and vision, and to our CEO, Dr. Shane Huntington OAM, for his exceptional leadership and strategic foresight. The Board also expresses its gratitude to our auditor, Frederik Eksteen of Collins & Co (Audit Pty Ltd), for his diligent work, and to all who contributed to preparing the financial report.

The audited LBS Financial Report for the year ended 30 June 2024 is commended to the members for review and approval at the upcoming Annual General Meeting.

Little Big Steps has been audited by Collins & Co and submitted to the Australian charities and Not for Profit Commission (ACNC) as part of Little Bigs Steps Annual Income Statement submission.

Little Big Steps Ltd (DGR 1) - ABN 31 626 833 832

**OMAR DE SILVA**

BOARD DIRECTOR AND CHAIR (AND ACTING TREASURER)

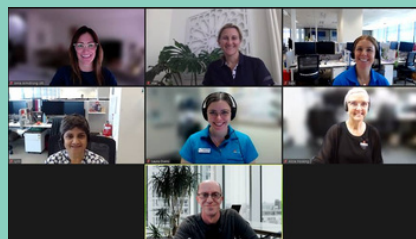
VR HEADSETS SENT TO  
HOSPITALS AROUND  
AUSTRALIA



LIONS CLUB  
MELBOURNE  
FUNDRAISING BBQ

EQUITY TRUSTEES  
GROUP  
SUPPORT

# A YEAR IN REVIEW 2023-2024



ESTABLISHMENT OF A  
NATIONAL PHYSIO  
NETWORK



Perth  
Children's  
Hospital  
**Foundation**

GRANT SUPPORT  
FOR THE PCH  
PROGRAM

GILLESPIE FAMILY  
FOUNDATION MAJOR  
DONOR, FUNDS  
LITTLE BIG STEPS FUTURE.

 **5 YEARS**

CHARITY  
SUPPORTER AND  
DONOR



COCKTAIL EVENT WITH  
A CHARITY SUPPORTER

**Jellis  
Craig**



BAXTER'S FUNDRAISING  
WALK

JOINED THE  
DELOITTE  
WORLD  
IMPACT DAY



COMMBANK & TDC  
SUPPORT

MAJOR CHARITY PARTNER  
AND DONOR

PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY  
**telethon 7**



MAJOR CHARITY PARTNER  
AND DONOR FOR  
BAXTER'S WALK





NEW  
PARTNER

# A YEAR IN REVIEW 2023-2024

NEW  
PARTNER



WELCOME TORI SA PHYSIO  
FTE1.0



WELCOME GRACE SANNA  
TO THE LBS BOARD

41 FITBITS  
SENT TO  
HOSPITAL  
PARTNERS



WELCOME JAKE WA  
PHYSIO FTE0.6

GILLESPIE FAMILY  
FOUNDATION MAJOR  
DONOR, FUNDS  
LITTLE BIG STEPS FUTURE.



MAJOR CHARITY PARTNER  
AND DONOR



WELCOME AMY NSW  
PHYSIO FTE0.6



FUNDRAISING  
COORDINATOR ONBOARD  
FOR A SECOND YEAR



WELCOME LISA WA  
PHYSIO FTE0.4



WELCOME JUDY NSW  
PHYSIO FTE0.4

MAJOR CHARITY PARTNER  
AND DONOR

*Campbell  
Foundation*

# NATIONAL PROGRAMS

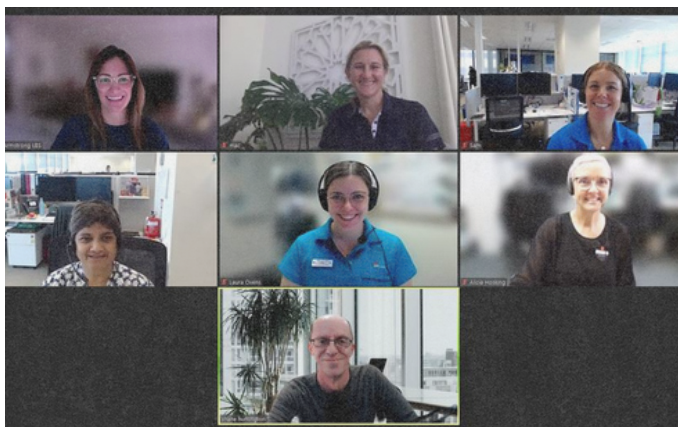
In 2023-2024 Little Big Steps had exercise medicine programs running in Sydney Children's Hospital (NSW), Perth Children's Hospital (WA), and Women's and Children's Hospital (SA).

These programs have continued to provide physiotherapy support to hundreds of children going through cancer treatment.

All three sites have demonstrated amazing success now with a full-time physiotherapist equivalent at each hospital site, supporting many of the kids coming through oncology wards.

In Sydney and Adelaide we have established 3-year programs, and in Perth we have established a 2-year program. At the Sydney Children's Hospital location our full time physiotherapists are supporting more than 100 kids a year. Sadly in Sydney overall this still accounts for less than 1/2 of the children in need.

Our physiotherapists across all our cities are working together to guarantee the best level of care for all the children we support. Early 2024, saw the establishment of the National Little Big Steps physiotherapy network..



Our goal is to fund programs nationwide to support children who have been diagnosed with, and are undergoing treatment for cancer.



# OUR IMPACT

## BRIDGETTE'S PATH TO RECOVERY FROM CHILDHOOD CANCER, SYDNEY CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL (SCH)

When 11-year-old Bridgette came home early one morning after vomiting at a sleepover, mum Kristie put it down to a tummy bug. But other symptoms soon started to pile up.

Kristie took Bridgette to the GP for blood tests and an MRI. While waiting for the results, they also went to the optometrist, suspecting a vision problem may be the cause of Bridgette's symptoms, but the optometrist noticed something was seriously wrong.

With severe swelling on both her optic nerves and a little bit of a bleed, within a matter of days, Bridgette underwent a craniotomy to remove a tumour the size of a golf ball from her brain at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick. Thankfully, doctors were able to remove 99% of the growth. But Bridgette's journey was only just beginning.

Bridgette was diagnosed an ATRT, a very rare, very aggressive type of childhood brain cancer and just 20 years ago, it was completely incurable.

Thankfully, her paediatric oncologist had worked in Boston, where a targeted treatment protocol for ATRT had just been successfully developed through a clinical trial. Bridgette's treatment journey was challenging for the once-active teenager.

Radiation therapy was draining on her body, but Kristie said the team at the Hospital were a vital source of comfort, strength and encouragement when she needed it.

*"The team at the hospital went above and beyond to make sure that Bridgette was as happy, healthy and as comfortable as possible. I can't thank them enough."*

August 2022 saw the end of Bridgette's cancer treatment. But Bridgette's battle wasn't over yet. After losing the ability to walk independently, she required intensive rehabilitation to help her learn to walk again. Physiotherapy plays a crucial role in restoring mobility and strength for children post-cancer treatment, aiding their journey back to an active and fulfilling life.

Through tailored exercises and rehabilitation strategies, physiotherapists provide vital support, fostering physical resilience and enhancing overall well-being in young cancer survivors.

While Bridgette's journey is ongoing and she will continue with physiotherapy to support her throughout her recovery, she has come so far from the end of treatment where she couldn't walk unassisted, to today where she can walk down the halls of her home, run around with her pets and ride her bike with her family.

"We wouldn't have got through her treatment as well as we did if we didn't have the support and the care from the doctors, nurses, and therapists."

**Thank you, Little Big Steps, for supporting vital oncology physiotherapy at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick** - Krisite, Bridgette's Mum



# OUR IMPACT

## AUGUSTINE (GUS) WERYK'S STORY

### PERTH CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL (PCH)

In May 2021, my 4 year old son, Gus was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia and commenced two and a half years of chemotherapy which left him with muscle fatigue, reduced muscle tone and extreme exhaustion.

We found that he was not able to participate in physical activity in the same ways as his peers, and as a very active kid, this left him feeling pretty down hearted and isolated. I contacted the physiotherapy department at our treating hospital PCH who commenced the Little Big Steps program and provided Gus and our family with fun, easy and practical exercises that we could not only do with ease at home, but also as a family.

Gus has loved spending time with the physiotherapist learning and practising his exercises and has enjoyed coming home to create obstacle courses and circuits that we are able to do as a family.

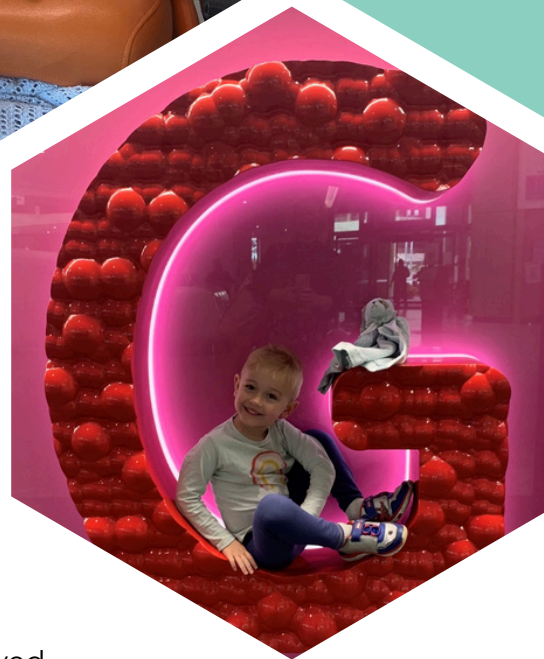
Over the past month, Gus' muscle tone and strength has improved and we are finding that he is no longer reaching the end of the week exhausted. He is now able to keep up with his peers and is enjoying attending sports at school.

The exercises he has learnt will remain an active part of our lifestyle and are easy to incorporate into our daily routine and family play time.

***Thank you Little Big Steps for an incredible program.*** Lindsay, Gus' Mum

### PHYSIOTHERAPIST, JENNY HOCHSTETTER- OWEN PROGRAM FEEDBACK

Gus and his family have been wonderful to work with and we have collaboratively developed a tailored exercise program implementing various tools and strategies which best suit Gus's specific needs and goals. Gus is always keen to participate in all the exercises during his physio sessions with Little Big steps at PCH, including mini circuits rotating around various task specific activity stations focusing on increasing his global strength, gross motor skills and endurance. Additionally, his family have embedded these recommended postural positions and exercises into his activities of daily living, enhancing his global strength, general wellbeing, and participation at school. Gus has taken on these activities with great enthusiasm and developed new skills whilst having fun-keep up the great work Gus.





# MEET OUR PHYSIOTHERAPISTS

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA (PCH)

### **JAKE COSENZA**

Jake completed his Bachelor of Physiotherapy at Curtin University in 2017. In this time, he has gained a broad experience working as a Physiotherapist for the Western Australia Country Health Service (WACHS) and has worked at Perth Children's Hospital since 2021 in a variety of different clinical roles. He has a particular interest in helping children achieve their activity goals and engaging them in meaningful activities. Jake is very excited to be able to offer physical activity opportunities for children receiving treatment for acute lymphoblastic leukemia at Perth Children's Hospital. When not at work, Jake enjoys getting outdoors, playing soccer and walking his dog.



### **LISA BLEUS**

Lisa has over 20 years' experience as a physiotherapist, specialising in helping patients through their cancer journey. She has worked in Perth with children being treated for cancer since 2010. Her interest is in helping children and their carers to continue live their best lives possible throughout the treatment journey and beyond by helping them to continue to do what kids do: move, explore, play, learn, grow, develop and have fun with their family and friends.



## SOUTH AUSTRALIA (WCH)

### **VICTORIA (TORI) LINTON**

Tori graduated with a Post Graduate Master of Physiotherapy from Flinders Uni in 2014, after completing a Bachelor of Human Movement and Exercise Science in 2012 at Uni SA. She has also completed a Post Graduate Certificate in Physiotherapy-Paediatrics in 2017 and the Paediatric Cancer module from Pinc and Steel International. Tori spent time working in country Victoria early in her career, and a brief period in Alice Springs. Tori has now worked within SA Health for over eight years, and at the Women's and Children's Hospital in Adelaide for over six. Tori has worked across all aspects of physiotherapy including orthopaedic, respiratory, oncology, neurology paediatric intensive care.

Tori works closely with the other allied health and medical teams within WCH to ensure an individualised, fun, safe and multidisciplinary approach.



# MEET OUR PHYSIOTHERAPISTS

## NEW SOUTH WALES (SCH)

### **AMY RUCKRIEGEL**

Amy is an oncology physiotherapist at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick. Amy completed a Bachelor of Physiotherapy at the Australian Catholic University in North Sydney in 2019. She has worked predominantly in paediatrics both in the hospital and the community. She has a particular interest in making exercise and physical activity fun and engaging through individualised approaches. As an oncology physiotherapist at SCH, Amy sees children with different types of cancer at different points of treatment.



### **JUDITH HALL**

I have the very rewarding experience of working in the Brain Tumour Rehabilitation Team at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick, a job which I have had for over 10 years. I am part of a team -Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist, Speech Pathologist and Psychologist, that work consistently to help patients and families who deal with this devastating diagnosis and subsequent treatment.

Our goal is to support our clients through their treatments and enable them to return to their lives after treatment with fewer complications and better quality of life. The outcomes are hugely variable.

I am lucky to be a physiotherapist. I think of myself as a coach, overcoming side effects and motivating progress. Rehabilitation doesn't start just because oncology treatment finishes. Rather it lies side by side with oncology treatment, limiting possible complications and thinking ahead about how to encourage quality of life. For myself, I have been working at Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick for over 30 years. I previously worked in orthopaedics, rehabilitation, and student supervision. Physiotherapy in Brain Tumour Rehabilitation involves rehabilitation, developmental input, and assessment, liaising with outside therapists and schools, and sadly, sometimes palliative care. It is a job which has taught me more than I ever imagined it would.





# BOARD OF DIRECTORS



**OMAR DE SILVA**  
CHAIR & DIRECTOR



**MIRIAM DEXTER**  
DEPUTY CHAIR & DIRECTOR



**VANESSA COHAN**  
DIRECTOR



**KATE HALFORD**  
DIRECTOR



**GRACE SANNA**  
DIRECTOR



**CINDY BAKOS**  
FOUNDER &  
DIRECTOR



**CASSANDRA HOWCROFT**  
FOUNDER &  
DIRECTOR

# OUR PARTNERS

## MAJOR DONOR

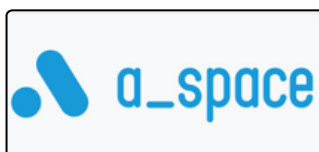
**The Gillespie Family  
Foundation**

(Founders of Baker's Delight)

## MAJOR CHARITY PARTNERS

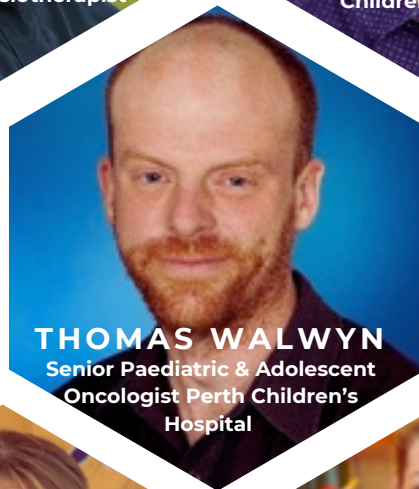


## CHARITY SUPPORTERS





# EXERCISE MEDICINE ADVISORY COUNCIL



# AMBASSADORS



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank you for your continued support

## CONTACT

Little Big Steps

Level 5,  
111 Cecil Street,  
South Melbourne 3205

Registered charity ABN 32 626 833  
832

[www.littlebigsteps.org.au](http://www.littlebigsteps.org.au)  
[info@littlebigsteps.org.au](mailto:info@littlebigsteps.org.au)



Little Big Steps acknowledges the traditional owners of the land we are working on and pay our respects to their elders both past, present and emerging.

