

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2020





**Sands volunteers are proud to offer 24 hr support to bereaved families  
across Australia.**

**We are here if you need to talk.**

**PH: 1300 072 637**



# Table of Contents

Message from the Chair & CEO.....	4
Our Impact.....	6
Delivering services.....	8
Our community.....	9
Sharing our message.....	10
Financial results.....	12
Special Thanks.....	13
Board of Directors.....	14
Volunteering at Sands.....	15



## Vision

Sands is the voice of bereaved parents and their families across Australia, promoting healthy grieving and bringing understanding and hope when a baby dies.

Sands exists to reduce the stigma associated with pregnancy and infant loss, reducing the isolation experienced by bereaved parents by helping our communities talk about it.



## Mission

Sands is a community of bereaved parents providing support, information and education to other bereaved parents and their families across Australia that have experienced pregnancy loss or a newborn death.

Sands also works in partnership with healthcare professionals to improve the quality of care and support for bereaved parents.

**“33 years ago I got in touch with Sands after my daughter died at birth. They provided me with understanding and compassion, and even today they still help me because the pain of losing a child never goes away” (Michelle)**

# Message from the Chair and CEO

**“The simple truth  
we want you to  
know is that you  
are not alone”  
(Parent Supporter)**

## A Challenging Year

2020 has perhaps been one of the toughest years Australians have faced, starting with bushfires and continuing with COVID 19, with both health and economic factors of concern to all Australians.

Sadly, for bereaved parents, it is fair to say that the year has been even tougher. For those who were newly bereaved, the impact of restrictions reduced the capacity for family and friends to provide much-needed support. For those whose bereavement occurred before the pandemic, the isolation associated with COVID restrictions was a trigger for many. This has led to an increased need for our services and an increase in complex presentations, amongst the people we are supporting.

COVID 19 has presented many challenges for Sands itself. We were disappointed to put a hold on our intended merge with Red Nose but felt that it was critical both organisations were focused on operations and supporting bereaved families during this time.

A lack of access to hospitals and to people's homes also meant we were required to delay the implementation of Hospital to Home

We have also been faced with a significant reduction in our fundraising income as many community events have had to be cancelled. It will be absolutely critical that as a community we rally around events when they resume and ensure that they continue to honour the babies we have lost and also deliver critical fundraising to support our services.

## Finding new opportunities

Despite the challenges over the course of the year there is much to celebrate. The end of 2019 saw us mark 40 years of Sands services in Australia – a milestone for any organisation.

The first six months of the year also saw well-attended key calendar events including our Walks to Remember.



The Board undertook consultation with members and volunteers across Australia, indicating just how committed and passionate our community are in their support for bereaved families. Whilst there were a variety of opinions on the best way forward, it was clear that in almost every case people were eager to ensure that peer support was available to newly bereaved families for the future.

These COVID times have also been a time of exciting growth and opportunity for Sands. We moved our groups online and attracted new audiences. We found new ways to provide support, both formally through options like “Ways to be OK” forums and informally through options like our Book Club and Journaling groups.

We were also very pleased to hear the “voices of bereaved parents” through surveys where more than 1500 people participated. These surveys focused on understanding views on the quality and availability of bereavement support both in health settings and across the community.

Of note was that fathers and extended families are not receiving the level of care and support needed and this will be a focus for Sands’ advocacy moving forward.

We were very pleased that the survey indicated significant improvement in support for memory making after stillbirth and newborn death over the last six years, indicating that our work with health

professionals is having a positive impact. Survey results for more than 80 families whose babies had died during COVID times indicated that their experiences in hospital were not worse than those reported in the nine months earlier and in many cases were better.

We are working to better understand these results so they can inform our training moving forward.

Finally, our staff and volunteers have been incredible, supporting each other and supporting anyone who has been in need during what has been a difficult time for everyone. We are incredibly proud to lead this organisation and to belong to a community that provides hope and encouragement even in the worst of times.



**Jackie Mead**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

**Nick Xerakias**  
**Acting Chairperson**



# Our Impact

## How Sands helped bereaved families this year



4000

bereaved parents supported through our national support services



1500

bereaved parents provided a voice about their bereavement care



65,000

Sands information booklets distributed to local hospitals



300

volunteers across Australia



90,000

visits to the Sands Website



20 million

engagements across media







**'Since going through the darkest days, I learned from so many people around me that I wasn't alone. There are so many people who have been down that path that we never knew until we too had walked it' (Jeremy)**





Sands' commitment to providing best practice peer support to grieving families has seen us succeed through many challenges this year. It was a year of review, response and growth demonstrating our responsiveness and continued accessibility for all bereaved families, across Australia.

An extensive national review of our face-to-face support groups was undertaken in late 2019. This review highlighted our strong engagement with existing groups and identified opportunities for new service options. We have seen a successful shift to online support groups following the cancellation of all face-to-face services.

Our new online groups commenced in March/April providing unprecedented reach and accessibility for bereaved families. Expanding services to encompass specific loss groups and providing an online support group for bereaved fathers has driven strong participation during the year.

Introducing our new online support forums - "Ways to Be Okay"- in conjunction with

## Service Growth

**Over 45 000 new factsheets distributed in 6 months**



**The national support line exceeded our annual target by more than 26%.**



**Our online support groups saw huge growth in number and attendance**



Red Nose has provided a new and varied support option and highlighted the strength of our joined models of support. Strong feedback from the 165 families registered for our initial forums has ensured our commitment to an ongoing service.

Our national phone and online services continued to provide their invaluable support to over 3200 bereaved parents. Our initiation of a call-back option for callers, demonstrates our commitment to ongoing development and delivery of a quality service. Our incredible team of peer volunteers, who actively engage in all regular debriefing and training opportunities, ensure that grieving families receive the most empathetic, compassionate and caring support possible.

# Delivering services to bereaved families through peer support

## New services introduced Ways to be OK

## More than 4000 bereaved families used our national services





## Creating and supporting our community

New traditions emerged with International Friendship Day proving a standout success early in the year as we came together to celebrate the strong connections bereaved parents have found at Sands. Building on this tradition of connection and companionship, we saw almost 2000 people honouring their babies in a record 13 Walks to Remember across Australia during October - International Pregnancy and Infant Loss Month. December, with International Volunteers Day, saw special acknowledgment of the extraordinary people who donate their time and put their hearts and souls into making all we do at Sands possible.

Just as we were gearing up for our next big calendar event, Say Their Name Day, in March our whole world shifted as COVID 19 restrictions began to impact the operation of our services, events and activities.

Events planned for Say Their Name Day were re-evaluated and we engaged our online community to get behind a virtual celebration for 2020. Despite the challenges, it was a good opportunity for our team and the community to find new ways to be there for each other throughout this very difficult period. Our national online book club, journaling workshops and community playdates all proved a hit, leading us into some exciting new areas to expand how we support the bereaved parent community.



**More community events than ever before.**



**More opportunities for bereaved families to come together through online events**



**Almost 1800 people attended 11 Walks to Remember across Australia**

## Expanding our reach and improving our tools

After months of preparation, we have re-launched our website [sands.org.au](https://sands.org.au). Our outdated infrastructure limited our ability to provide updated information and clear support options to bereaved parents. We have updated the look and feel of our site, so as to effectively communicate the warm and community-minded culture of the organisation. A key objective of the redevelopment was to ensure that bereaved families are able to find a warm, empathetic and welcoming community of peers.

We know that many bereaved parents now access our resources through our website on a smart device. The new content management system has given us greater control over content and its ease of use means we have been able to act in a responsive manner to the organisation's needs. We continually make the most of the resources we have and ensure the website acts as a tool for dynamic content, regularly providing the latest news and

upcoming events

## From brochures to factsheets

In early 2020 we released a new suite of Sands factsheets to replace our traditional brochures. Following a review in 2019 and feedback from bereaved parents and health professionals, it was determined that a more digitally-minded version of our brochures was required to ensure parents received the information they needed at the critical time.

The new factsheets are easy for health professionals to store and distribute and make digital distribution simple. We currently have 10 factsheets available and more planned shortly. The new format has allowed us to be responsive to the information requested by our community, including the development of a COVID-19 factsheet.

## Say Their Name 2020

On the 25th March 2020 we delivered our second Say Their Name Day. Despite the challenging environment of COVID 19, we were honoured to say the name and remember

thousands of beloved babies. We saw a significant growth in our community on Instagram participating in this year's campaign. A key feature of the 2020 campaign was our Say Their Name online memorial garden of forget-me-not flowers. This new digital memorial allows us to continue to Say Their Name over the year.

# Sharing our Message





Sands shows me I am not alone and  
that the thoughts and feelings I  
battle daily are not uncommon.



# Financial Results and Governance



## Financial Results

The financial results for the year ending 30 June 2020 reflect the first full year of trading and have delivered a significant surplus for the organisation.

Despite the impact of COVID 19 and the bushfires on our capacity to fundraise, both the actual income and the actual net result were better than budgeted. This has largely been achieved through tight management of expenditure and the support of Jobkeeper.

This financial year has seen changes to accounting standards, in particular how leases and income must be accounted for. This has impacted our financial statements and should be considered when comparing these results to the previous year.

Our 2019-20 financial results have included investment in infrastructure, such as the new website and have been achieved without reducing our staffing contingent or volunteer support.

This continued investment has been a cornerstone of Sands over time and ensures that there are services available for those who find themselves needing them in the future.

## Governance

We thank Seward Dawson for completing the financial audit in a timely and professional manner and the details included within our audited accounts will be used to meet our obligations to report to our funding bodies and, as a registered charity, to the ACNC.

The Board met 8 times throughout the year with all Board members attending more than 75% of meetings.

The Board was pleased to recruit Nick Xerakias, who holds a background in government relations and is a bereaved parent. Nick joined the Board in August 2019.

Steven Maycock resigned from the Board in June 2020. The Board thanks him for his service.

**"You are not alone. We see you. You matter. Your grief is valid, and your baby's life is important, no matter how short."  
(Parent supporter)**



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thanks to  
our corporate  
and community  
supporters

# Board of Directors



## Members of the Board

Rachel Green - Chair  
Nick Xerakis - Deputy Chair  
Lyndy Bowden  
Fozia Capela

Wayne Faulkner  
Kathryn Leischke  
Steven Maycock

"Creating meaningful connections  
help me to continue moving  
through my grief. I am excited to  
be part of a community creating  
events that build a healthier  
experience for others" - Nikki



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with a donation today  
visit  
[sands.org.au /donate](https://www.sands.org.au/donate)



# Volunteering at Sands



**“I’m so grateful to Sands for bringing Sara and I together as it has made my Sands experience what it is and given me a friend for life.” – Fiona Stark**

Sara Grant and Fiona Stark’s story of a friendship formed and nurtured through the most devastating of circumstances is one that encapsulates the value and importance of the peer support model that is at the heart of all of Sands services.

When we talk about Sands peer support, we usually envisage a volunteer parent supporter taking a shaky phone call from a grieving parent, or a support group facilitator offering the opportunity for a first timer to share their story of loss amongst others who understand.

If we look to some of the strong relationships formed between our volunteers, however, we can see how peer support reaps rewards behind the scenes at Sands too, as our parent supporters in turn support each other.

Self-proclaimed Sands’ ‘sisters’ Sara and Fiona first met at a Sands parent supporter training day in Brisbane almost two years ago.

Sara says “One of my favourite memories in the world is the day we first met. We were lining up to go to the bathroom during the lunch break at training and I think we spoke about 7,000 words in 10 minutes!”

**“It’s that feeling of instant connection that many bereaved parents talk about when they meet someone else who has experienced the loss of a child,” adds Fiona. “You don’t realise how much you have longed to hear someone else say ‘me too’.”**

After the pair were later rostered together on the 1300-support line, their friendship grew, and in Fiona’s words, “we haven’t stopped chatting since!”

Fiona and Sara now co-facilitate one of Sands online support groups, which both agree is a real honour to do together.

**“Sometimes people just walk into your life at exactly the right time,” says Sara.**

Everyone at Sands wholeheartedly agrees, we are who we are because of the work of our amazing volunteers and community.