



Flying Free Inc.

2023

Annual Report

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	3
Acknowledgment of Country	
Acknowledgment of Lived Experience	
Acknowledgment of Support	
Managing Director’s Message	4
Chairperson’s Message	5
Introduction	6
Who We Are	
Our Mission	
Our History	
Statement of Values	8
Our Team	9
Members	10
Projects	11
Survivors of the Esther Foundation	
Investigations	
Arts Therapy	
Events & Activites	12
2023 Mental Health Week Event	
Contacts	
Priority Counselling	
Legal Representation & Q/A Event	
Political Activism	
Volunteer Training	
Media	
Achievements	14
Funding & Resources	15
More Information	16

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge that Flying Free operates on the sovereign lands of the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, the traditional custodians of this country and its waters. We pay our respects to Noongar elders past and present, and acknowledge their wisdom and understanding. We know that Noongar people have practised cultural and community based healing approaches on this land for thousands of years, and seek to learn from their example.

Acknowledgment of Lived Experience

We acknowledge the valuable individuals who have shown incredible courage to share their lived experience. We acknowledge those who have fought and are still fighting for systemic change in WA Mental Health and/or Alcohol and other Drug (AOD) services. We would also like to acknowledge the valuable lives and lived experiences of victims of the Esther Foundation and other Mental Health and/or AOD services in Western Australia who cannot share their stories currently or are no longer with us.

Acknowledgment of Support

We would like to thank all those who supported us, even when it was controversial to do so.

David Hardaker
Jo Trilling
Senator Louise Pratt
Commissioner Jacqueline McGowan-Jones

Managing Director's Message

I am very proud to be writing this message in our first ever Annual Report. In 2022 I began advocating for justice for myself and other survivors. For the first time I felt like this was what I was supposed to be doing. As we continued I realized that the type of work I wanted to do wasn't available in Western Australia and was also greatly needed. Through the support and help of other survivors I began Flying Free and it soon became my passion and drive.

There was significant anxiety within our team and our community that we could follow in the Esther Foundations footsteps and become another unregulated, controlling and harmful service. Since the start our main priority has been to grow with conscious accountability and co-design practices. Despite planning and completing a majority of Flying Free's projects I have always consulted, collaborated and informed our team at ever step.

This report was challenging to write as I am always looking ahead towards the next goal. It feels un-natural for me to look back and consider all the work we have completed however I am incredibly proud of what we have achieved in 2023. With no paid staff we secured grants, ran an event, connected with over 15 organisations, held arts therapy workshops, became incorporated, a registered harm prevention charity, built a website, formed a committee and so much more.

As we grow and secure larger volumes in funding I expect Flying Free to flourish. I hope that the community support and encouragement we have received this year can develop into partnerships, funding and practical assistance. I am looking forward to the time when the fact we were created by survivors of the Esther Foundation is overshadowed by the incredible work we have done.

I hope that anyone reading this will see the immense potential of Flying Free and view us as the legitimate and worthwhile addition to community services and advocacy in WA we are.

Thank you for your ongoing support,

Gabriel Osborne (he/they)

Flying Free Co-Founder & Managing Director

Recipient of the Young People's Award at the 2023 Australian Human Rights Awards

Chairperson's Message

2023 has seen a huge amount of change, growth and development for Flying Free. Coming together after the media campaign expose of the Esther Foundation, Flying Free came out of the desire for further action and activism. While a number of us have been involved in the formation and running of Flying Free, I would like to take this opportunity to honour the immense commitment and work of Gabriel Osborne, without whom we would never have even come together to discuss forming the organisation, let alone get to the point we are at now. Gabe was the one who suggested meeting as a group of those interested in further activism, the one who has driven our work, and the one who has invested days a week to run the organisation. I am honoured to be here as Chairperson to support Gabe's work, and the work of the volunteers who have come along to share their passion for justice and their time with us.

I won't describe all of the achievements of the organisation because I know that Gabe has already done that in the numerous documents he has prepared for the AGM. I will just describe some of the highlights of the year from my perspective as Chair. Other than the things I have already written about Gabe's work, here are a few notables.

I am proud of the sense of community that we have been able to encourage and maintain within the Survivors of the Esther Foundation. I'm proud of the events and workshops we have run, and the online sense of community. I'm proud of the fact that this has continued and been sustained even in the time since the media campaign. I'm proud that I got to run the workshops series with Survivors, and I'm excited for the future of running further workshops. And one of the highlights of the year, I'm very honoured to have been able to travel with Gabe to Sydney where he was awarded the Young People's Award of the Australian Human Rights Award, for the incredible work he has done.

I feel this award was so supremely deserved, and also is indicative of the future of our organisation. To have reached a point of such recognition and achievement after only the first year, it is so exciting to think about where the organisation, through Gabe's work, will progress from here.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our work, whether it be with your time, ideas, energy, or even your presence in the community. We appreciate you so much, and we couldn't do any of this without you. Here's to the pursuit of justice for more survivors in future!

Cara Phillips (she/her)

Flying Free Co-Founder & Chairperson

BA (Theatre Arts), Grad Dip ECAT, LSDA, Dip. Youth Work, Grad Cert Divinity,
MA - Professional Communication (Screen Studies), Doctoral Candidate ECAT (MIECAT Institute)

Introduction

Who We Are

Flying Free was founded by three survivors of the Esther Foundation after the WA State Parliamentary Inquiry into the Esther Foundation and other unregulated Private Health Facilities. Through this report we further discovered the systemic failures, injustice, and ongoing trauma of the WA community. Flying Free was created to support and advocate for all survivors of abuse from Mental health and/or Alcohol and other Drug services, along with advocating for Mental health and Alcohol and other Drug treatment reform in WA. In May 2023 we started out as “Freedom from Institutional Abuse” and in October 2023 began the process of rebranding to “Flying Free”. We are an incorporated association, registered harm prevention charity and deductible gift recipient.

Our Mission

We are passionate about helping survivors reclaim control of their lives and their rights as human beings. Our mission is to reform Australia's Mental health and Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) services. We believe that comprehensive regulations are needed to ensure Australian's seeking treatment for mental health or addictions concerns are provided with evidence-based care. We believe effective change can only come by using lived experience voices. Our aim is to achieve systemic change through supporting, empowering, and educating consumers. Supporting them to share their lived experiences, heal from mistreatment, seek justice, and understand their consumer rights.

Our History

Despite Flying Free becoming incorporated in May 2023 our work and mission were underway long before. Cara Phillips, one of our co-founders and a survivor of the Esther Foundation courageously shared her story with numerous journalists. In January 2022 David Hardaker published Cara's story and they worked together to support other survivors to come forward. Cara's initial bravery paved the way for others, including another co-founder, Gabriel Osborne. After reading articles by David Hardaker, Gabriel started a Facebook group and titled it, Survivors of the Esther Foundation. The group became a focal point for the movement and quickly grew to hundreds of members.

Cara continued to support survivors speaking to the media. From this the Esther Foundation was forced to enter voluntary administration and shortly after, a Parliamentary Inquiry was announced. Cara, Gabriel and two other survivors sought out pro-bono legal representation but were unsuccessful. Gabriel began engaging in meetings with politicians and political groups to share his story. He created a go-fund-me which raised \$500 which allowed us to host an in-person group meet up at Kings Park, create a website and advertise our stories.

Gabriel and Cara supported survivors to share their stories with Parliament and went to speak in person. As media attention grew and the Parliamentary Inquiry was underway Cara and Gabriel began receiving messages from individuals in WA and other states sharing their experiences of similar abuses from other services. They decided more needed to be done for the community, so working together alongside another survivor began forming what would become Flying Free.

OUR

HISTORY

Statement of Values

We believe that everyone should have **personal autonomy** including the freedom to develop their personality, express their feelings, make choices and not be unreasonably limited. We will ensure we put this value into practice by allowing our volunteers and staff to express themselves in all areas of their work, not be micromanaged, and be encouraged to express their feelings and thoughts even when they are contrary to managers or supervisors.

We believe that there is an inherent risk of corruption within institutions and that those in positions of power often will go to great lengths not to give up that power. To ensure Flying Free is not another organisation rife with incompetence and corruption, we have made **accountability** one of our core values. We will continuously improve and grow our understanding of governance. We will create a culture where all members, volunteers, staff, community members etc, feel invited and supported to share their ideas, concerns and comments. We will have processes where feedback doesn't go into a void to never be heard and we will commit to responding to all feedback.

We believe everyone should be free to express themselves creatively, to think differently, to explore and never be constrained by the mainstream way of existing. Our value of **creativity** will be seen at Flying Free through our workspace and culture being open to all the ways of thinking and living. Through our embracing of neurodiversity and encouragement of new ways to make change and support the community. We also value the use of arts as a facilitation for healing, sharing and growing connection.

We believe that as an organisation whose mission is to advocate for fairness, respect and justice we must enshrine those values within all aspects of our work. We are committed to creating an equitable culture where everyone has access to the same opportunities and resources. Our dedication to **equity** means actively addressing and dismantling the usual barriers that may hinder an individuals' access and progress.

We celebrate diversity in all its forms, recognizing that it strengthens our collective potential. Our value of **inclusivity** extends beyond mere tolerance; we actively seek out and embrace the core differences of individuals and their experiences. By championing inclusivity, we aim to create an organisation where diverse perspectives contribute to richer ideas, stronger collaboration, and a sense of unity among our team. We also believe that safety and respect of these differences is core to building a sense of belonging. No speech or behaviour which makes an individual feel disrespected or unwelcome will be tolerated.

We were built off the value of **connection** and believe this must stay core to who we are and the work we do. We believe connection is an essential component of healing, sharing and advocating. We have seen and lived how finding a community can provide hope, understanding, validation and support. We will encourage connection not just with those we support but within our teams by learning about each other, understanding each other's strengths, perspectives and passions.

Our Team

Flying Free is run entirely by the work of passionate volunteers. Thank you to all the volunteers who have helped us throughout 2023.

Cara, Emma, Christopher, Gabriel, Alex, Nayoung, Joy, Lucy, Michelle, Jessica, Renee, Sarah & Kellie.



Over 50% identify as LGBTQIA+.

The Flying Free volunteer team collectively dedicates approximately 30h/p week.

Two thirds have a lived experience of mistreatment in Mental health and/or AOD services.

40% are former residents of the Esther Foundation.

5 are located outside of Western Australia.

Members

Thank you everyone who has become a member in 2023. Membership supports us by showing the community support for our work. Members get invited to meetings and can vote for committee members and organisation changes, get updates on our work and get first notice of volunteer and paid work positions.

We currently have 11 Lived Experience Members, 3 General Members & 2 Organisation Members.

If you would like to become a member please scan the QR code below.



Projects



Survivors of The Esther Foundation

Private group · 341 members

Join group Share

Survivors of the Esther Foundation

Survivors of the Esther Foundation is our online peer support group for ex-residents of the Esther Foundation, with 341 members. The peer support group brought together old friends connected by trauma and provided a space to reconnect in a safe and healthy way. This year we hosted 1 in person group meeting which had 12 attendees.

We ran 3 polls and discovered many interesting things about the community.

1. 2/3 of our members were residents of the Esther Foundation for over 1 year.
2. 49% of our members live in just 5 LGA's, Mandurah, Rockingham, Wanneroo, Victoria Park & Swan.
3. 51% of our members say that their mental health has worsened since the media attention and Parliamentary Inquiry have taken place.



Investigations

During the first 3 months of Flying Free, our entire committee met with the Commissioner for Victims of Crime. We discussed the need for survivors who have been victims of crime to report their experiences and for investigations to be undertaken. We have since had multiple meetings with the Victim Support Service and representatives from the WA Police.

Gabriel has also met with the Corruption and Crime Commission in hopes of an investigation of possible Police neglect of survivors. This is currently on hold as there were not enough survivors wishing to share their experiences to pursue this type of investigation at this time. Gabriel is still committed to working towards an investigation of the WA Police and will revisit this in 2024.

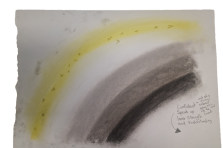
Arts Therapy Workshops

From March 2023 to November 2023 we hosted individual sessions and group arts therapy workshops of survivors of the Esther Foundation.

Cara Phillips, a survivor of the Esther Foundation, Co-founder and Chairperson of Flying Free, hosted these workshops for her Masters of Arts Therapy Practicum.

The project was focused on telling your story and supported survivors to share their experiences through various art techniques.

Cara hosted **10 group workshops**, **15 individual sessions** and supported **12 individual survivors** throughout the project.



Events & Activities



2023 Mental Health Week Event

In October 2023 we hosted a Mental Health Week event called “Community Connection & Carefree Creativity: Survivors of the Esther Foundation” thanks to an \$800 grant from the Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH). The event involved arts therapy activities, card games, conversation, food, drinks, mental health information & a self care giveaway.



Despite lower attendance than we expected the event was a success and we learnt a lot about the barriers within our community which can prevent in-person attendance. We would like to thank WAAMH for providing us with the grant for this event, the Guerrilla Establishment for donating items for our self care giveaway and all the volunteers who assisted with planning, setting up and running the event.

Contacts

Throughout 2023 Flying Free has engaged in meetings and conversations to advocate for reform in Mental health and AOD services, to get justice for survivors of the Esther Foundation, and promote our organisation. Below are just some of the organisations, agencies, and individuals we have connected with.

- Commissioner for Children and Young People
- WA Community Legal
- Law Access
- Western Australian Association for Mental Health
- Consumers of Mental Health WA
- Western Australian Council of Social Services
- WANADA
- WA Mental Health Commission
- Ending Conversion Practices WA
- Equality Australia
- SOGICE
- Alcohol and Other Drug Consumer & Community Coalition



Priority Counselling

6 months following the release of the Parliamentary Inquiry report, Gabriel contacted the women’s health services listed as being able to provide priority assistance to ex-residents of the Esther Foundation. Just one out of the five services listed was still able to honor this agreement. After many emails and phone calls, LUMA (previously Women’s Health and Family Services) began offering priority assistance to survivors. This is ongoing and has been utilized by a handful of survivors. We appreciate Luma for doing what they can to support our community.

This is not a solution as many survivors require ongoing clinical psychology and other therapies for complex trauma which this service doesn’t provide. Luma is also not accessible to survivors in regional areas or living in other states. Survivors who are gender diverse also may not feel comfortable using the service, even if they can physically access it.

Events & Activities

Legal Representation & Q/A Event

In late 2022 Gabriel contacted numerous barristers and advocated for the survivors' continued need for pro-bono legal assistance. In January 2023 he secured pro-bono legal representation for all Esther Foundation survivors from a private law firm in collaboration with a barrister. He began coordinating communications between the law firm and 70+ survivors. They coordinated a town hall style event for all survivors to come and ask questions in person. The room was packed with over 25 attendees.

This legal action is ongoing and is expected to see outcomes in late 2024/early 2025.

Political Activism

We coordinated an in-person gathering at the City of Joondalup Council Meeting. A small group of survivors attended and shared their concerns regarding the Shalom House land dispute in question. Flying Free will always support and advocate for survivors even in the face of threats or at risk of political, legal or other consequences.

Gabriel met with the Attorney General's office through collaboration with Ending Conversion Practices WA. They discussed the need for the ban on gay conversion practices, agreed to in the Parliamentary Inquiry to be survivor-led and focused on a civil scheme.

We made a submission in support of an Australian Human Rights Act. We used our unique experiences and shared how this act could have protected us and why we believe it is important.

Volunteer Training

We supported training for two of our volunteers through Evolve WA and Consumers of Mental Health WA. Some topics included;

- Group Facilitation
- Grant Writing
- Community Consultation
- Peer Work
- Risk Management

Media

Cara began discussions with a documentary company to share our stories in a more genuine, educational and safe way. In 2023 Cara facilitated countless media appearances and continues to do so.

Gabriel has spoken about Flying Free at the WACCOS Conference, Australian Human Rights Awards and to the newspaper Out in Perth.

Achievements

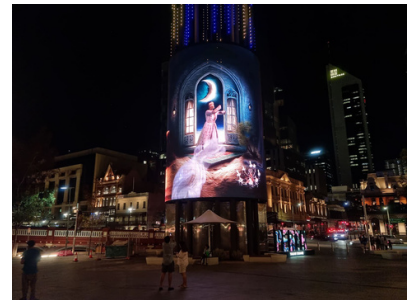
We believe that every time we support a fellow survivor to share their story, access counselling, gain legal advice and more that we have achieved. However we would also like to note some other achievements of our committee members in 2023.

Lucy Lorenti gave birth to a baby boy while having another baby under 12 months old. She started a new job and within 3 months was given a raise for her skills in supporting complex behaviours.



Emma Osborne moved into a new house, completed a diploma and started a new job in early childhood disability education.

Cara Phillips graduated from her Masters of Arts Therapy. She became the national learning advisor for the SAE Institute and collaborated on an artwork project which premiered at PICA .



Jennifer Stowell became a supervisor in her field, now working as a Clinical Neurophysiology Scientist Supervisor. In this role she advocated for and achieved cultural and structural change for her department.

Gabriel Osborne received the Young People's Award at the 2023 Australian Human Rights Awards. He got his drivers license and started working at Consumers of Mental Health WA.



Funding & Resources

We planned to have a stall at Pride Fairday 2023, Unfortunately we had to cancel due to a lack of volunteers, time and funding. We received donations from three Labor MP's totaling \$500, in support of our Pride FairDay stall. Once we alerted them to the cancellation one donor requested a refund while two graciously allowed us to keep the donations to use on future projects.

We secured a \$3000 grant from Connect Groups for training workshops and venue hire. This funding will be put to use in early 2024.

We started our fundraising campaign to email 200 businesses, organisations and public figures who were supporters of the Esther Foundation requesting donations. 20 have been sent so far.

From the beginning of Flying Free our co-founders have donated to organisation administration costs, venue hires, art supplies, food, drinks and more, along with hundreds of hours dedicated to growing the organisation and working towards our mission.

Revenue	Source	Expenditure
\$800	Grant from Western Australian Association of Mental Health	2023 Mental Health Week Event
\$278	Political and Individual Donors	No Expenditure
Total: \$1,078		



More Information

Website:

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ABN:

27 758 749 286

Bank Details:

Flying Free Public Fund
BSB: 036-051
Account number: 599118

Flying Free
BSB: 036-051
Account number: 599097

