

See the difference charitable and philanthropic trusts can make

(HORIZON)

September 2026

IN THIS ISSUE:

HOW FLEXIBLE PHILANTHROPY IS CHANGING YOUNG LIVES

and other stories

youth
off the streets

*Youths Off The Streets. See page 12.
Photo credit: Youths Off The Streets.*



Equity Trustees

Read online at
eqt.com.au/Horizon





WELCOME

What can happen when the right idea meets the right support?

In this issue of Horizon, you will see how philanthropic investment is helping turn possibility into progress, from the laboratory to the classroom, the workplace and the wider community.

In the pages ahead, you will meet researchers developing new approaches to gene therapy and using AI, robotics and assistive technology to explore new possibilities for people with cerebral palsy. You will read how the Ear Foundation Australia is tackling hearing problems that can go unnoticed, helping children hear, learn and stay engaged at school.

You will also discover what can happen when systems are changed to recognise people's strengths. Australian Spatial Analytics is creating employment pathways for neurodivergent Australians by rethinking how people are recruited and supported. Meanwhile, Youth Off The Streets is using flexible funding to respond to what young people need as their circumstances change. And through St John Ambulance, young people are building lifesaving skills, confidence and a sense of belonging.

All of these stories show how philanthropy can do so much more than fund a service or project. It can provide researchers the room they need to test a vital idea, give an organisation the flexibility to respond, or offer a neurodiverse individual the opportunity to change their life path.

I hope the articles that follow help you to feel the difference that good ideas, expertise and sustained support can make, and to see the many lives that have been changed along the way.



JODI KENNEDY

General Manager, Philanthropy & Community Trustee Services

+61 3 8623 5278

jkennedy@eqt.com.au

THE AUSTRALIAN INNOVATION THAT COULD RESHAPE GENE THERAPY

From an Australian laboratory to potential clinical trials,
Dr Jiang-Hui (Sloan) Wang's research is exploring new ways to
deliver gene therapy to the eye.



Credit: Centre for Eye
Research Australia

Groundbreaking research at the Centre for Eye Research Australia (CERA) is working towards new ways to protect sight in people with inherited retinal diseases.

Dr Sloan Wang, Head of Ocular Genetic Therapeutics Research at CERA, is engineering next-generation viral vectors known as adeno-associated viruses (AAV) to improve how therapeutic genetic material is delivered to cells in the eye. "The current gene therapy products using these AAV vectors have limitations in how much genetic material they can deliver to cells," Dr Wang says. "That's why we're trying to engineer the next generation of AAV vectors, so we can deliver it more efficiently to the targeted cells."

A viral vector is a vehicle used to deliver therapeutic genetic material into a target cell. In gene therapy, a modified virus can carry a healthy copy of a gene into the cells where it is needed. A major challenge is getting that genetic material safely and efficiently into the right cells of the retina.

The stakes are high. Inherited retinal diseases can progressively damage the retina, causing deteriorating vision and, in many cases, blindness. Around 16,000 Australians are affected, with CERA describing inherited retinal diseases as the most common cause of blindness among working-age Australians.

"For most of patients with inherited retinal disease, there is no chance to get any sort of treatment or cure," Dr Wang says. "With this AAV-engineering technology, if it proves to be effective and safe, we have greater hope for those patients."

Dr Wang's research is supported by a \$350,000, two-year grant from the DHB Foundation, managed by Equity Trustees. The funding has helped to establish his independent research program at CERA after returning to Australia from the United States, where he trained in gene therapy.

The grant is also helping build Australia's capacity to engineer next-generation viral vectors locally. "This is the first time Australia has had the capacity to engineer and manufacture these AAV vectors," Dr Wang says.

"The engineered AAV I developed have been very successful and are superior compared with existing viral vectors," Dr Wang says. "We've also attracted a lot of interest from industry to further test these viral vectors."

The next stage could bring the research closer to patients. The vector is only one part of a future gene therapy, with an appropriate therapeutic gene also needed for a particular disease. "If everything comes together, and the technology proves safe and effective through further testing, I think we can start a Phase 1 clinical trial for a selected inherited retinal disease within five years."

Philanthropic funding is helping make that possibility achievable in Australia, supporting Dr Wang's research and the specialist infrastructure needed to develop and produce viral vectors locally.

"We've now established very close collaborations with our US partners, and this gives us a great opportunity to continue the research."

The potential goes beyond Dr Wang's own research program. CERA's emerging viral vector capability could support other gene therapy programs and researchers across Australia, helping build a stronger local pathway from laboratory discovery towards future treatments.

Dr Wang hopes that pathway will ultimately give people living with inherited retinal disease options they have never had before.

“

“With this technology, if it proves to be effective and safe, we have greater hope for people living with inherited retinal disease.”

HOW BETTER WORKPLACES ARE UNLOCKING NEURODIVERGENT TALENT

Neurodivergent Australians have the skills many employers need. Here's how one organisation, with support from the William Buckland Foundation, managed by Equity Trustees, is creating pathways to employment by rethinking recruitment and workplace practices.

Different ways of thinking can be a powerful workplace advantage. Yet for the one in five Australians who are neurodivergent, including people with autism, ADHD, dyslexia and other neurological differences, those strengths are not always recognised or given the opportunity to shine.

Geoff Smith, CEO of [Australian Spatial Analytics \(ASA\)](#), says many neurodivergent Australians are unemployed or underemployed because recruitment and workplace systems are still designed around neurotypical ways of thinking, communicating and demonstrating ability.

"Employment is about much more than a pay cheque," Geoff says. "It's closely linked to confidence, identity and a sense of belonging. Neurodivergent people have so many extraordinary skills to offer workplaces and yet, so many are sitting at home unemployed."

Established in 2020, ASA trains and employs neurodivergent people as geospatial and [engineering](#) data analysts, providing paid employment while building workplace skills for long-term careers. Geoff says the key to creating meaningful employment is changing the way people are recruited, trained and supported.

That approach is being strengthened through ASA's Integrated Transition Project with support from the William Buckland Foundation. The four-year initiative provides training, paid employment and workplace support, helping junior analysts build the skills, confidence and experience needed to transition into long-term careers.

It starts with recognising that capability isn't defined by a traditional education pathway. "The regimented way of tertiary education doesn't suit everybody, but that doesn't mean you can't be a great employee doing the actual work."

The same principle applies to recruitment. "In a job interview, we're not looking to catch you out because the role we want you to deliver isn't about that," Geoff says. "We've changed the interview process because we want people to do their best. We want to employ them."

Candidates receive interview questions in advance, giving them time to prepare and demonstrate what they know. Once employed, expectations are clear, communication is direct and structured and practical workplace adjustments help people do their best work.

"There's lots of little things that you can do, which is great for everybody. It's not just for neurodivergent people. They don't really cost much. They're just different ways of working."

[Brendan](#), a neurodivergent environmental science graduate, struggled to find work that reflected his qualifications.

"Joining ASA gave him the opportunity to apply his skills on commercial geospatial projects, gain valuable industry experience and build confidence in his own abilities. Working alongside a supportive team helped him see a future in the industry," says Geoff. Brendan has since transitioned to Yarra Valley Water.

The project has so far employed 62 junior data analysts, with 32 transitioning into new roles. By May 2027, ASA aims to employ 100 and support 50 into ongoing employment.

Since its founding in 2020, ASA has created more than 250 careers for young neurodivergent adults, with 76 per cent previously unemployed. More than \$8 million has been invested in training and \$22 million in wages, while 85 employees have transitioned into careers with other organisations.

"The goal has always been transition," Geoff says. "We want people to leave us because they've found the next step in their career."



Credit: Australian Spatial Analytics

“

“Neurodivergent people have so many extraordinary skills to offer workplaces and yet, so many are sitting at home unemployed.”

THE TECHNOLOGY THAT'S CHANGING WHAT'S POSSIBLE FOR PEOPLE WITH CEREBRAL PALSY

AI, robotics and assistive technology are opening new possibilities in cerebral palsy research, with innovations designed to improve early intervention, communication and mobility.



Credit: Cerebral Palsy Alliance

The rate of cerebral palsy in Australia has fallen from one in every 400 births to one in every 700 births over the past two decades. This change reflects the work of Cerebral Palsy Alliance, researchers and health professionals across Australia to understand cerebral palsy, prevent it and reduce its impact.

"The 40 per cent reduction in the rate of cerebral palsy over 20 years is an amazing achievement for a not-for-profit," says neonatologist Professor Nadia Badawi AM, Chair of Cerebral Palsy at [Cerebral Palsy Alliance](#).

Prof Badawi attributes the progress to research that's been focused on outcomes that matter to people with cerebral palsy and their families. Now, that research reaches well beyond traditional clinical science, and encompasses robotics, brain computer interfaces and assistive technology. Prof Badawi leads more than 45 researchers working across prevention, early detection, treatment and technology.

One key area attracting much attention is artificial intelligence, which can be used to identify babies at risk of cerebral palsy earlier, when early intervention can have the greatest effect.

Currently, the General Movements Assessment can identify babies at high risk with 97 per cent accuracy, but it requires specialised training and a health professional to evaluate the recording and then examine the baby. The team is developing an AI system that could allow parents to record their baby at home and upload the video for assessment.

"We are already 80 per cent of the way there," Prof Badawi says. "With a bit more help (and philanthropic funding), this could be a solution for the whole world."

Prof Badawi explains that earlier identification could make a significant difference. Cerebral palsy is often diagnosed after six months or even a year, by which point the period of fastest brain growth has passed. The proposed system could help families access intervention within weeks of birth, giving babies an earlier opportunity to benefit from therapy.

"If we get in early, we can help children do better at school and just have a better outcome in the long run."

The technology program also seeks to unlock potential that can be difficult to access through conventional means. Researchers are developing voice libraries and exploring brain computer interfaces for people whose physical impairments affect their ability to communicate. Exoskeletons could help young children exercise and become more mobile, while new wheelchair designs are being developed to navigate stairs and allow users to stand.

This work extends into startup development through Remarkable, Cerebral Palsy Alliance's disability tech acceleration initiative. The program supports innovators developing inclusive technologies for people with disability that extend beyond cerebral palsy to areas including Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, dementia and stroke.

Prof Badawi believes that additional philanthropic funding could help take some of these innovations further, giving researchers and technology developers the opportunity to develop promising ideas and move them closer to practical solutions that can improve people's lives.

"Philanthropists are solution-focused and brave in the way they back new ideas and innovations. So when a philanthropist asks me where we think the investment has the biggest leverage, I say that investing in disability innovation is a really good area because so many technological solutions that are developed for cerebral palsy can be applied to wider audiences and help many groups of people.

We're living in an amazing era where the right investment can do so much. In our case, it can help turn these innovative ideas into life-changing solutions that will benefit so many people."

Cerebral Palsy Alliance is supported by Equity Trustees active philanthropy clients.

“

"There is just so much innovation happening. We're living in an amazing era where the right investment can help turn these ideas into solutions for so many people."

HERE'S HOW EAR FOUNDATION AUSTRALIA IS HELPING KIDS TO HEAR, LEARN AND THRIVE

An invisible hearing condition can leave children struggling in the classroom while families and teachers remain unaware. Ear Foundation Australia's outreach program in the Pilbara is helping change that, one community at a time.

In Western Australia's Pilbara, hundreds of children are struggling to hear what's being taught in the classroom because of an invisible condition that affects their learning. Despite the gravity of the barrier getting in the way of their wellbeing and education, the health issue can easily go unnoticed by everyone around them. CEO and co-founder of the Ear Foundation Australia, Dr Lara Shur, explains that even families and teachers may not realise a child is struggling to hear.

"We have kids in class who are not able to hear due to a very preventable condition, and yet we still expect them to function well, listen, learn and thrive."

The condition is middle ear disease, which can cause significant hearing loss. In Lara's experience, it's often seen starting early in life. "A baby with ear disease may cry because their ears hurt, but the connection between sore ears and hearing is not necessarily recognised. As the child grows, living with poor hearing can become normal." By the time the child is aged two or three years old, and not talking as expected, the underlying hearing problem may still be missed. "The child may not even realise they have a hearing problem and nobody has put it all together."

Ear Foundation Australia was established in 2013 by Lara and two other co-founders, bringing together three different areas of expertise: audiology and speech pathology, teaching and education, and nursing and audiometry. That combination is central to the organisation's approach.

"Kids operate in education. Kids need to get well through a medical model. Kids need rehabilitation for their hearing issues through the allied health lens," Lara says. "So the secret ingredient has been the combination of the different approaches."

Today, Ear Foundation Australia runs several programs across Western Australia, including its Earbus outreach service. It has seen more than 100,000 children since it began, including just under 20,000 through outreach. In the Pilbara East, where Lara says some of the highest rates of ear disease in Australia are found, the outreach program has grown from six sites to 22.

The teams travel long distances to reach communities, then return regularly to check children's ears and hearing, provide treatment and follow their progress. The service is designed to keep children moving through treatment rather than leaving families with a referral they may struggle to pursue.

The model brings health, medical, allied health and education together. A nurse can look in a child's ears and identify a problem, an audiologist can test their hearing there and then, and a doctor or nurse practitioner can provide treatment. The audiologist can then speak directly with the classroom teacher about what the child can and cannot hear and what needs to happen next. Medication can also be dispensed to the family on the spot.

"So you don't lose children in the clinical pathway," Lara says. "It turns out that when you keep them in the treatment pathway, and you come back month after month, children get well."

That continuity is now being supported by a new three-year, \$55,000 grant from the Maria Vasas Foundation, managed by Equity Trustees, with the granting decision endorsed and supported by the co-trustee and advisory board. The funding is supporting Ear Foundation Australia's outreach work in the Pilbara East, where around 2,500 to 3,000 children need regular checks and treatment. It helps bring specialist and medical staff into communities each month.

Consistency is critical. Children may move from one community to another, so the teams follow them and continue their care. Lara says that after nine to 18 months of regular visits, the organisation can see rates of ear disease and perforated eardrums fall sharply.

"This grant gives certainty to the visits," Lara says. "Ultimately, this is not just about getting kids well. It's about getting them well in school, and then allowing them to hear like everybody else can: to learn, to stay in school and to thrive."



"Our Foundation is committed to supporting young people through education. By fostering cultural connection, self-worth and confidence, we help create pathways for them to realise their potential and thrive."

Maria Vasas Foundation

Credit: Ear Foundation Australia

“

"It turns out that when you keep them in the treatment pathway, and you come back month after month, children get well."

HOW FLEXIBLE PHILANTHROPY IS CHANGING YOUNG LIVES

Behind youth homelessness are often circumstances far beyond a young person's control. Youth Off The Streets works alongside them to rebuild stability, education, employment and independence, with long-term, flexible funding helping make that possible.



Credit: Youth Off The Streets

There's a false but persistent stereotype of a young person who is homeless. The lingering myth inaccurately dictates that they are difficult, disengaged and somehow responsible for their own circumstances, despite their age. It's a perception that Judy Barraclough, CEO of [Youth Off The Streets](#), strongly challenges.

"It breaks my heart when I hear people talk about young people as being inherently bad or that they are intentionally doing things that are antisocial," says Judy. "The reality we see is that young people are forced into situations where they have to leave their home, or they're caught up in things we wouldn't want any child to be caught up in, because of their circumstances."

Those circumstances can include domestic and family violence, parental incarceration and homes that are no longer stable or safe. Judy says more than 90 per cent of the young people supported by Youth Off The Streets have experienced some form of domestic and family violence.

One of those young people is Kai*. At age 11, he started living on the streets after fleeing a violent home. Two years later, he was experiencing depression and substance misuse. After moving from regional New South Wales to Sydney, he was sleeping rough and becoming increasingly isolated.

"Youth Off The Streets outreach workers began connecting with Kai regularly, providing a meal and a safe place. Over time, they gained his trust and were able to provide crisis accommodation, casework and mental health support," says Judy. Within about six months, Kai had re-engaged with his studies, found part-time employment and moved into independent housing.

Judy explains how Kai's experience illustrates why there is rarely a simple or predictable pathway out of homelessness and complex disadvantage. "Youth Off The Streets needs to be able to respond to what a young person needs at a particular point in their life, rather than fit their circumstances around a predetermined program."

The Will & Dorothy Bailey Charitable Fund, managed by Equity Trustees, has supported Youth Off The Streets since 2022, providing \$55,000 over five years. Importantly, Judy says, the funding is unrestricted.

"That's really valuable because it means that we can direct the funding towards what young people actually need, rather than a single issue that they're facing."

That flexibility becomes particularly valuable as circumstances change. "Demand for Youth Off The Streets' services is increasing as young people experience the pressures of the cost of living, while the organisation is also facing higher operating costs. Unrestricted funding allows resources to move to where they are most needed, while long-term support gives the organisation greater security to maintain services and plan ahead."

Unpredictability is often at the heart of Youth Off The Streets' work, as each young person brings a different set of circumstances and challenges. "Their situations are really complex and they're not linear. No two young people need exactly the same thing at the same time because their circumstances are unique."

Judy adds that receiving unrestricted funding is particularly valuable, as it provides Youth Off The Streets the flexibility to respond to the full range of needs involved in supporting a young person. A young person's recovery can require outreach, accommodation, casework, mental health expertise and the infrastructure behind those services, which are often immense and not short term.

"With unrestricted funding, we are able to direct some of that towards the full cost of providing our services," says Judy.

That kind of flexible support can help a young person move from crisis towards education, employment and independent housing, as it did in Kai's case

"We want every young person to have the chance to reach their true potential, no matter their circumstances."

**Name changed to protect privacy.*

“

“We want every young person to have the chance to reach their true potential, no matter their circumstances.”

COULD THESE YOUNG PEOPLE SAVE YOUR LIFE? ST JOHN AMBULANCE THINKS SO.

This youth program is giving young people more than first aid skills. It is helping them to find belonging, build confidence, serve their community, and open doors to new opportunities.

At an age when many young people are still figuring out where they fit in the world, St John Ambulance (St John) gives them something rare: a sense of belonging and purpose, and the chance to save lives.

Nicole joined St John's youth program in year eight expecting a fun extracurricular activity and a chance to learn first aid. "Little did I know that it would become so much more than that, and eventually become such a big part of my life," she says.

St John's Youth Program combines first aid, leadership and community service for young people aged eight to 17. Young people learn how to respond to injury and illness by practising first aid in realistic scenarios, and then volunteer in their community, applying the skills they have learnt. Members can also train as youth leaders from age 18 to 25, and go on to run the program themselves. It's a unique opportunity for genuine leadership and responsibility. Many young people also continue to volunteer with St John as adults.

"St John doesn't bring people together because they live in the same place or come from the same background, it brings people together because they are willing to turn up, and give their time to be there for other people," Nicole says.

That instinct to show up for others is now shaping what Nicole wants to do with her own life. She hopes to study medicine, and eventually work in medical retrieval.

"Before joining, medicine wasn't a career I saw myself pursuing at all. But through St John, being someone who is prepared to help in a medical emergency became an important part of my sense of self."

Nicole's experience is the kind of change St John hopes to make possible for thousands more young people. Today, just under 2,500 young people take part across almost 100 divisions nationwide.

The program's impact extends beyond knowing what to do in an emergency. Anita Truninger, General Manager Engagement at St John NSW, adds that young people gain confidence, self-esteem, purpose and a sense of belonging through the program.

"It's about empowering young people so they know they can actually have some agency in their life," Anita says. "They can contribute and serve their community."

That opportunity is increasingly in demand. NSW currently has waitlists for young people wanting to join, while St John has set a national goal of reaching 5,000 participants by 2029, with regional communities a particular focus.

Reaching them requires more than opening another division. Funding is needed to train volunteer leaders, provide medical equipment, uniforms, offer camps and accredited leadership programs, and maintain youth voice and child safety at the highest level. "Per child, the investment is significant, and we try to make the program available to everyone regardless of their circumstances," Anita says.

Philanthropic support, managed by Equity Trustees, can help the organisation meet demand and extend the program to more young people, particularly in communities where opportunities can be limited.

Fairlie Tucker, National Director of Partnerships, Fundraising and Community Impact at St John Ambulance Australia explains that investment now can give more young people skills and confidence that continue to shape their lives well beyond their time in the program.

"Financial support will go a long way," says Fairlie. "There's a lot of evidence to prove that this program works."

"We know what to do. It's an incredibly powerful program. Now we just need to reach more young people. With that support, we can transform more lives and open doors for young people."



"They get this amazing sense of meaning and purpose in the world. I think when they know that they can step into these emergency situations and provide first aid, they then suddenly realise that they can do so much more in the world."

Sally, Youth Leader at St John Ambulance.

To watch St John youth talk about the program and its impact, [watch this video](#) celebrating 100 years of St John youth in Australia.

Credit: Charlie Bartak.
St John Ambulance Australia.

“

"We know what to do. It's an incredibly powerful program. Now we just need to reach more young people."



Read previous editions of Horizon at:
www.eqt.com.au/Horizon



Equity Trustees

Equity Trustees Wealth Services Limited (ABN 33 006 132 332) AFSL 234528 and Australian Executor Trustees Limited (ABN 84 007 869 794) AFSL 240023 are part of the EQT Holdings Limited (ABN 22 607 797 615) group of companies, listed on the Australian Securities Exchange (ASX:EQT).

This communication is intended as a source of information only. No reader should act on any matter without first obtaining professional advice which takes into account an individual's specific objectives, financial situation and needs. Copyright © 2026 Equity Trustees, All rights reserved.

This newsletter was produced September 2026.