ANNUAL REPORT
16/17

www.eatingissuescentre.org.au
OUR MISSION

At The Eating Issues Centre we believe in the importance of making sense of eating issues in respectful and non-judgmental ways. We acknowledge the multifaceted and interactive factors that contribute to the development of eating issues and seek to promote empowerment, connections and change on individual and social levels.

NOURISH. CONNECT. THRIVE

INDIVIDUAL COUNSELLING

GROUP THERAPY

PEER MENTORING

INFORMATION and REFERRAL

WORKSHOPS/TRAINING
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ABOUT US

The Eating Issues Centre (TEIC) is a community based non-profit charity promoting positive body image and prevention of eating issues, as well as offering supportive therapeutic options for people affected by eating issues.

Funded by Queensland Health, TEIC provides information and referral, free counselling, therapeutic groups, and peer support for people with eating issues throughout Queensland. We work closely with the Eating Disorders Association (EDA) to providing support to people living with and recovering from eating issues, and their carer's and loved ones.

OUR GOALS

• Provide a range of services that respond to the diverse needs of individuals with eating issues
• Contribute to the evidence base and practice knowledge of working with people with eating issues, from a feminist perspective
• Enhance the support options available to people with eating issues through increased community awareness, understanding, and recovery options
• Develop and maintain TEIC as a dynamic organisation leading the field of providing therapy for people with body image and eating issues
• Provide services under Medicare and NDIS

OUR SERVICES

• Individual Counselling
• Group Therapy
• Peer Mentoring
• Information & Referral
• Workshops/Training
• Medicare Rebated Services
A.G.M. time signals the fact that another year is fast coming to an end, and simultaneously presents me with an opportunity to speak to you. It has been an absolute pleasure for me to watch the growth of TEIC and to serve you as chairperson once again. Much has happened over the past twelve months and I am happy to announce that TEIC is growing in leaps and bounds.

Without doubt it has been an eventful year, with TEIC undergoing many changes and restructures as we continue to strive towards providing the best service delivery model possible to our clients. This includes not only being able to reach out and work with more clients in Queensland, but also provide higher quality programs, innovative ideas and efficiencies. The afore mentioned help us to grow and support the community as best we can.

I acknowledge that our team has undergone some major operational changes, yet they have banded together and taken it all in their stride and together have achieved phenomenal outcomes:

- We saw an increase of 88% in Peer Support clients through our Hospital Speaker and Peer Mentor programs
- An increase of 290% in the number of clients we have seen in our Group Support programs
- A new assessment and intake process to facilitate a quicker response time
- Creating a breakdown of practitioner hours and how to best allocate time to better support clients and meet our Queensland Health KPIs
- Trauma informed practice training for practitioners sponsored through North Brisbane PIR
- Upskilling our admin coordinator, who is our first port of call for clients, by doing a Mental Health First Aid course sponsored by Mental Health First Aid Australia
- Practitioners and mentors presented at two ANZAED conference, Noosa and Sydney; QuEDS forum and North Brisbane PIR training workshop.
It is understood how appreciative we are to have such an amazing team working at TEIC and none of the above results could have been achieved without the efforts of Alee, Claire, Natalie, Emily, Georgie & Isa who are tasked with delivering and creating our programs, ensuring they are current and aligned to what the community needs are.

A special mention also needs to be made to Belinda Chelius, who has been leading the organisation and working tirelessly to support the long-term strategy and vision of TEIC.

Thank-you also to the sessional counsellors who have provided ongoing support to many of the people who use the services at TEIC as well as our volunteers and interns, we appreciate all the time and energy that you give to our organisation. Without the unwavering support of our volunteers and the assistance of our interns we could not continue to thrive.

This year the Management Committee has demonstrated their leadership and visionary skills guiding the organisation through their transition period and into one of thinking of long term stability.

As such it gives me great pleasure to announce that in 2018 we will be opening a dedicated arm of TEIC providing Medicare rebated counselling services and therapeutic and behavioural support to clients under NDIS. Speak to your NDIS planner about including meal support, counselling or group work. TEIC is happy to support you during the initial planning stages of getting a plan.

We look forward to an even greater year ahead with further innovation and continual improvements to our service delivery.

Stacey Horder
Chair
Audited Financial Statements for the year ended 30 June 2017. The Statement of Profit or Loss shows the consolidated result for all auspices and operations of THE EATING ISSUES CENTRE INC (TEIC).

Overall TEIC achieved a surplus of $16,140 compared to last year’s surplus of $13,694. Performance Summary

Despite a significant reduction in revenue, TEIC maintained a surplus position by careful management of Program Support services expenses, and reduction in wages.

During 2016, TEIC received PIR Food for Thought Project funding of $99,920. The remaining rolled over funding of $23,751 was spent in the 2017 year. Further, in 2016 TEIC received a one-off grant of $32,212 from Queensland Mental Health Commission for the Peer Mentor and Wellbeing Program.

Other contributions to the surplus were the Insurance claims and the bond refund for the Gladstone Rd premises.

The budgeted profit outlook for 2018 is to break even.
Statement of Financial Position - TEIC has net assets of $131,407.

Our current assets of $263,941 are $131,407 greater than our current liabilities (Current Ration of 2:1). TEIC continues to hold sufficient funds to cover all of our liabilities and provisions.

The staff and committee are to be congratulated on their continuing efforts in providing the high standard of service to the community.

I thank all the TEIC staff for helping me manage the financial system and records of the association; and the committee for their ongoing support.

Rex Brar (Treasurer)
In the words of Nelson (Madiba) Mandela ‘It always seems impossible until it’s done’. This has been my mantra since I started 7 months ago.

As a TEIC team we have conquered some mountains by pulling together, sharing our knowledge and expertise, and strengthening relationships internally and externally.

We have re-discovered and valued the art of humor and vulnerability and, as true feminists, reflected on transparency, equity and justice. To consolidate these values, we gathered our team to explore who we are as an organisation and who we want to be as a future organisation. Using an Acceptance and Commitment therapy tool we created a ‘bulls-eye’ diagram of our shared values and evaluated how closely we feel we are enacting those identified values.

The outcomes were enlightening, created insights into our team dynamic, our strengths, and our ‘need some work’ areas:

- Closest to the ‘bulls-eye’, rating 4, was the value of a holistic treatment approach (Biophychosocial approach), with the client at the centre.
- Coming a close second was the value of empowerment, both for clients and practitioners at 3.5.
- The value of acceptance within the frame of ‘doing no harm’ and ‘duty of care’ was third at a rating of 3, as were the values of care/nourishment, playful creativity and being agents of change for clients and in the wider eating disorder sector. As a team we needed to work on the values of transparency and authenticity.

7 months in we are kicking these goals!

As seen from this extensive report the team, mentors, students, volunteers, and management committee have achieved phenomenal outcomes. Using Queensland Health Community Managed Mental health funding we have reached, supported, and engaged with brave, courageous clients who are recovering or recovered and ‘paying it forward’ by becoming mentors.
It is with a very sad heart TEIC bid Alee Lee a ‘see you later’ after 10 years of dedicated and passionate service to clients, mentors, mentees and the wider eating disorder sector. Alee designed, implemented, and coordinated the TEIC Peer Mentor Program, a true ‘jewel’ in TEIC’s ‘crown.’ We wish Alee the best in her and her partner Naomi’s new adventures on the Sunshine Coast.

Claire Day is also moving her beautiful family to the coast for a better quality of life. However, she will continue working as a practitioner with TEIC’s Medicare rebated arm. Claire has shared so generously of herself, her own recovery, and professional insights as a Social Worker. Ben, Layla and Oliver are very fortunate to have you as a partner and mother-goddess.

I want to extend a special thank you to Fiona Hunt, my predecessor, for scouting, finding, and facilitating the huge move to our new premises. We are finding much joy in this lovely, creaky-at-night building.

This has all led to our long awaited and planned co-location with EDA, our sister organisation. We came together as two organisations and are slowly becoming one.

I am truly blessed to have a very supportive and experienced management committee to guide me. A special welcome to Rex as TEIC’s new treasurer.

I thank you all with great gratitude and respect.
Belinda
OUR PEOPLE

Alison Lee  
Eating Issues Practitioner

Claire Day  
Eating Issues Practitioner

Belinda Chelius  
Manager

Emily Stanley  
Eating Issues Practitioner

Georgina Bullock  
Admin Coordinator

Nat Scales  
Eating Issues Practitioner
Our Community Presence

Kinellar House: Embedding eating issues support in the community

Our beautiful new location is a staple of Toowong's rich history. Built in 1895 by local businessman Charles Patterson (1843-1926), Patterson went on to serve as first; thirteenth, and seventeenth mayor of Toowong.

The Eating Issues Centre location allows us to maintain strong community links with organisations such as:

- QuEDS
- Royal Brisbane Women's Hospital
- Communify Partners In Recovery
- PHNs
Join Us

The Eating Issues Centre and the Eating Disorders Association are excited about our new beginnings!
We hope you can help us celebrate by joining us for our
LAUNCH

Healing & Hope during challenging times

FRIDAY, JUNE 2ND FROM 4:00PM till 6:00PM
89 SHERWOOD ROAD
TOOWONG, QLD 4066
RSVP by Friday, 26th May to info@eatingissuescentre.org.au
Drinks and Hors d’oeuvres will be served
Associate Professor Brett Emmerson AM
Executive Director for Metro North Mental Health formally officiated the event

OUR FORMAL LAUNCH 2017
Aunty Dawn Daylight performed welcome to country through song story telling. Christophe played an acoustic set during the event.
On World Eating Disorders Action Day, The Eating Issues Centre and the Eating Disorders Association invite you to our

Art and Photo Exhibition

Date: 2nd June 2017

Time: 10:00am – 12:00pm

Address: 89 Sherwood Road, Toowong, QLD 4066

Theme: Healing and Hope
WEDAD crane making activity, facilitated by peers, prior to the formal launch event
TEIC Client group - Who did we support?

- TEIC implemented a new client management system - CSnet
- Training commenced across both TEIC and EDA sites in December 2016
- The site went live in January 2017
- The implementation has been a significant upgrade for both sites in accurate data collection and the fidelity of reporting to Queensland Health
- Ongoing improvements are implemented to ensure client treatment plans, records and reporting is in line with best practice
- As the system was only 6 month old at the end of the financial year, close up some demographic features are missing. However, the data is in line with current trends around the presentations of eating disorders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EATING DISORDERS TYPE</th>
<th>FEMALES</th>
<th>MALES</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NUM</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>NUM</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulimia</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compulsive Eating</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSFED (old EDNOS)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anorexia</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orthorexia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Binge Eating Disorder</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<td>85</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</table>

Clients by Eating Disorders Type

- Bulimia
- Compulsive Eating
- EDNOS
- Anorexia
- Orthorexia
- Binge Eating Disorder
- [No value entered]
A 10-week and 18-week therapeutic group were run at TEIC between 2016-2017. The 10-week group was open to people of all genders and the 18-week group was open to women only. Jannah Hoopman, Masters of Counselling student, conducted research throughout her placement on the specific needs of men in therapeutic groups for eating issues. This will assist TEIC to consider the possibility of male-specific groups in 2018.

18wk August-December 2016

- Facilitated by Nat Scales and Claire Day
- Mixed representation of eating issues; 90% of participants had diagnosis of Bulimia Nervosa, or primary diagnosis of Bulimia Nervosa with Binge Eating Disorder or Anorexia Nervosa, 1 client with Anorexia Nervosa diagnosis
- Age range- 20-35yrs
- Mean sessions attended- 7.2
- Gender – all female.

10wk February-April 2017

- Facilitated by Nat Scales, Claire Day and Jannah Hoopmann (counselling student)
- Even representation of eating issues; 25% of participants with Anorexia Nervosa diagnosis, 25% with Bulimia Nervosa, 25% with OSFED and 25% with Binge Eating Disorder .
- Age range 21-36yrs
- Mean sessions attended- 8.1
- Gender – 9 women, 1 transgender person.
GROUP PROGRAM

Feedback from both groups:

- I haven’t been purging in a long time since I started the group. I feel like I have control over my binges and don’t want to purge. I still have huge body issues but I feel so much closer to recovery. In regards to changes to eating issue as a result of completing TEIC group: The significance has been immeasurable.
- It became clear to me that the important of facing inner solutions is critical. I previously had no skills to do so.
- I feel better in myself and more confident. I have a support network that I didn’t have before. I know myself better and why my eating issue developed.
- TEIC has really challenged me in the way I think about food and the way I treat my body. I have more energy now to participate and enjoy life through this group. I am learning to just enjoy life and take more time for myself and I am beginning to pressure myself less to constantly succeed and achieve.

GROUP CLIENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015/16</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016/17</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2016: June to December

- 24 participants interviewed – 12 mentors and 12 mentees
- 10 pairs (20 participants) matched
- Composition of mentees - 7 Brisbane; 2 Sunshine Coast; 1 Toowoomba
- 6 mentees completed the program
- 1 mentee from Toowoomba sustained contact with a Brisbane based mentor who offered Skype meal support when unable to meet up in person
- One mentor transferred to North QLD and was unable to sustain contact with her mentee. One of our senior mentors stepped in to support her through to the final celebration and has continued to support this mentee beyond the program

2017: January to June

- 17 mentee applications & 12 offers made
- 9 pairs – 18 participants
- 1 mentee no show – who has since returned and is currently attending the pregnancy and parenting group
- 6 Brisbane
- 2 Sunshine Coast
- 1 Toowoomba
- One Mentor discovered she was pregnant during the first month of the program and became very unwell during the program, but managed to sustain contact with her mentee, despite this, with support from TEIC
Quotes from Mentees:

- I learnt that recovery isn’t just about food, and that I need to ask for help if I am to recover.
- I don’t think that I would have been in a position to accept hospital treatment without my mentor.
- I learnt how to communicate what I need with those around me.
- I learnt that I can be honest about how things are and that I won’t be judged for it.
- I feel more at peace with how relationships are…it’s not my fault and I don’t deserve mistreatment.
- It’s ok to have breaks from work when I need them. I don’t have to work myself into the ground for other people.
- It’s ok to eat in front of others.
Mentors report benefits...
Perhaps one of the most interesting elements of this program are the post program reflections received from our mentors and senior mentors. When asked had the program negatively impacted their recovery mentors said:

*It has reminded me why I never want to engage in ED thoughts and behaviors again.*

*I suppose it was a challenge to spend so much time with someone who was so unwell that I couldn’t help think “could be like her”... slip back into my old habits. This was overcome and I feel stronger than before.*

*I have recognised through mentoring how far I have really come.*

*Mentors consistently reported feeling that being involved in the program supported their own recovery and made it easier to connect, communicate and ask for help when they needed it.*

*I feel like the relationship goes two ways – while I hope I have assisted my mentee in her recovery, I know she has inspired me and helped me to continue growing and evolving.*

*It has encouraged me to keep pursuing my career goals in human services and I know that one on one work is something I enjoy and am capable of. There is a strength in admitting when you’re not coping and discovering that the support is there as soon as you ask for it. The program has helped me to realise the importance of self-care and being honest with myself.*
Sharing and Connecting with the Voice of Lived Experience

Across Australia and New Zealand, non-government community-based organisations incorporate the voice of lived experience in their services. In the last year, NGOs have supported 1000s of individuals, families, professionals and organisations by providing hope that recovery from an eating disorder is possible.

"The mentoring programme has been a huge support to me as I work towards and through the recovery process. Someone who has been able to recover and make a healthier life for themselves is motivating and breeds the most tremendous hope."

The Eating Issues Centre Peer Mentoring program

"Finding Edanz has truly been lifesaving. I have a team to call on, a caring, informed one, knowing I can just pick up the phone and talk to a real person is the difference between right and wrong, despair and hope."

EDANZ Helpline

"The benefits from including lived experience in treatment programs are limitless — there is a plus for everybody involved — health professionals, the person who has recovered, the person who is recovering. The only loser is 'ED', as the 'HE' has nowhere to hide anymore."

June Alexander Eating Disorder Author

Changes of Eating Disorder Symptoms Post Peer Mentor Program
(EDI—Inventory Scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>PRE PMP</th>
<th>POST PMP</th>
<th>CHANGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drive for Thinness</td>
<td>40.64</td>
<td>39.77</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulimia</td>
<td>52.31</td>
<td>45.61</td>
<td>6.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating Disorder Risk Composite</td>
<td>46.69</td>
<td>49.17</td>
<td>2.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Self Esteem</td>
<td>48.48</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interoceptive Deficits (stress, fear &amp; confusion)</td>
<td>50.35</td>
<td>49.54</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asceticism (Self-Discipline)</td>
<td>50.68</td>
<td>46.28</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity Fears</td>
<td>50.18</td>
<td>46.85</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eating Disorder Risk

"My mentor helped me to be in public and is helping me to trust people again — she is helping me to experience what it is like for someone to know I have an eating issue and treat me as a normal person."

The Eating Issues Centre Peer Mentoring program

"Listening to other parents stories gave me hope and made me feel less alone...that it can happen to any family."

Eating Disorders Association Support Group

"Hearing the story of someone who has recovered was both inspiring and relevant to my own recovery. They had some extremely helpful advice to share which will definitely stick with me forever."

Eating Disorders Victoria Stories of Recovery program

"I really came to feel like if I wanted someone to talk to or be heard, she was there. It really helped me on reflection that we had similar eating issues as the behaviour itself was something I hadn't really talked about before. It was a huge part of undermining my behaviour. I was also able to be very open with someone and build a friendship, and knowing she understood and that it was ok to lean on her when I needed to and that she wanted me to was wonderful."

The Eating Issues Centre Peer Mentoring program

Talk with your local eating disorders NGO today and let’s work together to use the voice of lived experience to inform all of our priorities and practices.
HOSPITAL SPEAKERS PROGRAM

Peer Mentor Support

100
2015/2016

188
2016/2017

TEIC’s lived experience speakers have been gaining increasing attention from a variety of organisations and there have been more opportunities to speak at a variety of professional development forums. Speakers agree that the opportunity to share their experience is extremely valuable to them and supports their recovery by enabling them to give something back and transform their painful experiences into something that is valued by the community. This year saw a huge growth in the number of speaking engagements, with ongoing partnerships between the Royal Brisbane and Women’s Hospital (RBWH) and the Eating Disorders Outreach Service which has been renamed QuEdS.

RBWH sessions:

10 sessions were attended with a total of 37 attendees across the 10 months
23 patients – (2 people have attended 3)
The speaker pool grew from 2 – 6 speakers

QuEDS sessions:

In April 2016 QuEds (formerly EDOS) began including two TEIC speakers in their 12 week Outpatient Day Program.

• 4 day programs have were attended by TEIC Speakers
• Approximately 40 occasions with a total of 25 participants

Several speakers have participated in one of trainings and events which have included:

• ANZAED Autumn Series, Noosa
• ED MHPN Breakfast, Windsor
• TEIC Service Opening
TEIC’s move to Toowong at the end of December 2016 did not impact upon service delivery or delivering quality counselling services in 2017.

TEIC continued to provide free counselling as well as subsidised fee for service counselling and Medicare rebate counselling. Medicare bulk-billing options have been available throughout the year.

To enable this, TEIC has two part-time workers at 18 hours/week each who provide therapeutic services including counselling. TEIC’s PMP worker has also been able to provide some free counselling services within her hours and additional ad-hoc funding, that was obtained throughout the year, was channeled into providing extra free counselling hours.

TEIC acknowledges the valuable contributions made by students, sessional counsellors and Medicare-rebate eligible counsellors to our counselling services.

The demand for free and affordable counselling remains high and these additional counsellors allow TEIC to meet the presented need through providing additional and after-hours counselling.

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TEIC looks forward to developing a Medicare arm in 2018 which will increase capacity for people to access affordable, quality counselling for eating issues.

TEIC developed and trialled a new Model of Care in relation to initial contact and intake appointments.

TEIC Students are crucial in this model and it has allowed TEIC Counsellors additional time to dedicate to counselling hours.

TEIC’s one-on-one support draws on a range of evidence-based counselling models and techniques and is client-centred and driven.

All support work continues to be delivered in a holistic context designed to complement other treatment the person may be receiving.

We work closely with treatment teams and medical professionals.

Additionally, we highly value on connecting people to support people with lived experience and also to their own support networks.
OUR VOLUNTEERS

Anastasia Blake heads up the catering volunteers for the Group and Peer Mentor Programs.

Initial meals in the group programs provide separate ingredients, always using fresh, seasonal produce. As the course progresses, meals become more complex until the final weeks when main meals are served. Local food businesses give discounts for TEIC - which stretches the budget.

A few volunteers helped occasionally during the year giving them an insight into the sector, and providing new menu ideas.

WHY DO WE COOK @ TEIC

Providing meals during the course of TEIC’s group programs, enables us to model healthy eating behaviors, eating in a social context and offering support to individuals around their relationship with food. TEIC’s focus is not so much on food, what you eat or how much you eat, rather creating an environment of a shared experiences, mutual support and learning skills to manage the unhelpful thoughts and anxiety that often accompanies eating.

A special thank you to all our Mentors, who offer up their time to support TEIC’s mentees

A Special Thank you to Tanya for coordinating the Speaker Program rosters

Volunteer hours spent in 16/17:
2186 across all TEIC services
OUR SUPPORTERS

Funding Bodies
- Queensland Department of Health
- Queensland Mental Health Commission
- Partners in Recovery - Brisbane North PHP

Business Partners
- Julian's mowing
- Grill'd Toowong
- Tim Stewart - website development and graphic design
- Pam Chaimbers - who made the blinds for TEIC's office

Community Partners
- Queensland Eating Disorder Service (QuEDS) for partnering with us to deliver and continuously improve statewide services to people with Eating Issues and their loved ones
- Queensland Eating Disorders Service (QuEDS) for their ongoing collegiate support and engagement with the Peer Mentor Program. Dr Warren Ward for his continuing support, and Shane Jeffries for his ongoing support of the service
- The Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital; particularly Michelle Roberts for her leadership and support in the Hospital Speaker Program
- Headspace Redcliffe - For support, especially setting up our Medicare ARM
- Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYMHS)
- The Butterfly Foundation
- Eating Disorders Victoria
- ANZAED
- QLD Alliance for Mental Health
- QCOSS
- Arafmi
Student Placements

- Jannah Hoopman
- Bridie Stewart
- Marina Nassif

Volunteers

- The TEIC Management Committee for their time, leadership and skills
- The Mentors, Senior Mentors, Mentees for their incredible devotion, humour, and hard work
- Aunty Dawn Daylight
- Christophe Langlasse
- Sam and Dan from Julian’s Mowing
- Anastasia Blake

Management Committee

- Chairperson: Stacey Horder
- Treasurer: Rex (Ramandeep) Brar
- Secretary: Susan Gobbar
- Ordinary member: Suzannah D’Juliet
- Ordinary member: Anastasia Blake
- Ordinary member: Marc Bryant
- Ordinary member: Vanessa Fabre

Thank you to all of our supporters and community
Here we women open without sharp things and fingers.
Here we have learned the art of sharing, of breathing together, of taking up space.
Us women are gatekeepers, standing guard at the black iron,
   Behind which is home to our greatest fears.
We learned to take silver keys and slowly, carefully, we turn them in the locks of those gates we guard so fiercely.
I want to write a poem for the women who have shared themselves here in this space,
   Who told their stories,
   Who felt fear in their bones and spoke anyway.
I want to write a poem for the women who have shown me their strengths and their weaknesses,
   Who have let me see their triumphs and their downfalls.
Us women who come back again and again, stronger with each blow that knocks us down.
I want to write a poem for the women who circle in bean bags and cry together, who breathe together, who eat together.
Us women are learning what it is to live,
   To honour our pasts,
   To keep moving forward.
   Put your foot down, one after the other,
   And if that's all you can do today, then bravo for the shoes you walk in!
   Let them keep you up right.
   Let them do the walking for you.
We have learned how to laugh and cry together.
We have learned how to stare our demons down until they buckle under the weight of our eyes.
   And when they didn't, we all stood together to hold each other up.
This is for the women I have learned to heal with.
This is for the women who would be flashlights against the monsters in the dark.
This is for the women who deserve love and compassion,
   Themselves being the top of the list to give it.
This is for the women who are worth so much more than their demons give them credit for.
This is for the women who inspire me to fight back.
This is for the women who have the strength to heal, and at long last, breathe deeply, welcoming the beginning of something wonderful.

Group Client poem