

A DECADE OF IMPACT 2013 - 2023



Since 2013, Earbus Foundation has delivered the following to Aboriginal and at-risk children in WA:

+128,000

occasions of care

68,499

ear screens

24,065

GP/NP consults

31,659

hearing tests

12

regions

200

sites

“The trust relationship that Earbus has formed with communities requires enormous investments of time and energy. It is a relationship that is not easily formed and should be treasured when it comes to health issues in Indigenous communities.”

Lewis Mulvey, Principal

And delivered the following to newborns and infants in private maternity hospitals:

66,252

newborn screens

7

hospitals

84,584

individual children

“I could not be happier with the service and support that I have received from everyone at Earbus; you all went above and beyond to make us feel comfortable and supported - from the moment I made my first phone call asking for help to the welcoming we received when we came to Perth, And it continues with the visit to our son’s school in our home town.”

New Parent

A JOURNEY BEGINS

10 years ago, a trio of friends came together around a kitchen table in Wanneroo with a big idea: To help some of the most vulnerable kids in our state – an area the size of Western Europe – by developing a one-stop-shop approach to Aboriginal ear disease for the children least likely to have a service.

The challenge was to reach the most remote children. Those living in communities across the Pilbara, Goldfields, Kimberley and Mid-West regions of WA. The more immediate challenge was to build and fund an organisation that could support and deliver the services required – audiology, nursing, primary care and specialist ENT. Out of this passion with purpose was born Earbus Foundation of WA.

This is the story of that 10-year journey underpinned by friendship, professional collegiality, strong values and visionary commitment. Almost 90,000 children have benefitted as a result. Almost every region of Western Australia has been impacted.

The guiding light and mentor was Professor Harvey Coates AO who first brought the Earbus idea to Australia from his native New Zealand; the brain child of Sir Patrick Eisdell-Moore. Designed to reach Maori and Polynesian families estranged from mainstream health services, the Earbus concept was to take the service to where the people live with all the services they need in one place.

Kariyarra Elder and Knowledge Holder Sue Beath, Badimaya/Yamatji academic Dr Carol Dowling, and the Office of Aboriginal Health under the leadership of Dr Ken Wyatt AM were integral to the creation of the Earbus service blueprint.

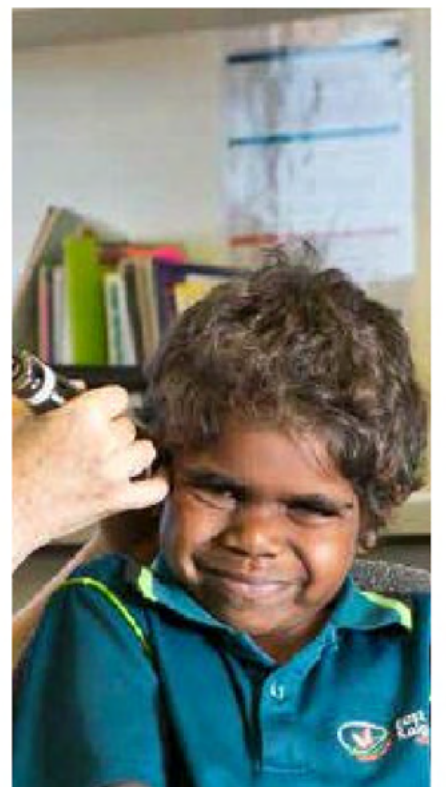
The most satisfying moment will always be watching a child hear properly for the first time. The transformative power of grommets can open up a world of hearing and participation for children who have lived in a fog of ear disease and exclusion.

Numbers matter, but the human stories matter more. Behind all the numbers of children helped, hearing tests conducted, GP consultations and more, are stories of collaboration, engagement and enthusiasm with schools, daycares, Aboriginal Medical Services, inter-agency partnerships and local champions.

To reach those communities we have found funding from many different sources to build a sustainable and successful profit-for-purpose enterprise. Along the way, there have been many moments of recognition and reward that have bolstered our spirits and renewed our commitment.

Earbus Co-founders Paul Higginbotham, Lara Shur and Dee Parker, along with Patron Professor Harvey Coates AO, have shared every step of this 10-year journey. While we are proud to celebrate these achievements, none of them would have been possible without our friends, supporters, sponsors and partners.

This is our celebration of their involvement, energy and generosity.



OUR STORY

Earbus Foundation of Western Australia [Earbus] is a multi award winning charity established in 2013. Earbus was established as an incorporated association of members under the WA Associations Incorporation Act (2015).

Since inception, Earbus Foundation has embarked on a journey of collaboration with Aboriginal communities across Western Australia, transforming ear health outcomes for thousands of Indigenous children. This unwavering commitment to listening to and learning from communities has been the cornerstone of our success in addressing the disproportionately high rates of middle ear disease among Aboriginal children.

From the outset the aim of the founders was for Earbus to have a balance around gender and Aboriginality. The Board of Earbus Foundation of WA has reflected this from its earliest days when Badimaya/Yamatji academic Dr Carol Dowling assumed the Chair and provided invaluable guidance and wisdom. The Foundation aspires to be a model of successful and purposeful cross-cultural collaboration. The Board is now chaired by Kariyarra Elder and Knowledge Holder, Sue Beath. Current Patrons are Professor Harvey Coates AO (Clinical) and Ms Wendy Duncan.

Earbus has reached over 120 locations across the Pilbara, Goldfields, Gascoyne, Peel, Kimberley, Perth Metro, Murchison, Wheatbelt and Southwest regions of Western Australia, partnering with Aboriginal Medical Services, schools, daycares, kindergartens, playgroups, child parent centres and regional agencies such as the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

From the very first Earbus regional trip in February 2014, the aim has been to capture a suite of comprehensive, meaningful clinical data so that children's ear health could be measured, and our program evaluated for effectiveness and efficacy. As our data set grew in size and complexity we needed better tools. With generous pro bono support from Microsoft in 2016, we commenced a project developing a customised version of PowerBI to house and retrieve our massive database. Currently it houses data for over 13,500 Aboriginal children.

In October 2015, Earbus took over the delivery of the Newborn Hearing Screening Program in private maternity hospitals in WA on behalf of the WA Health Department. To date, almost 70,000 babies have been screened by Earbus in private hospitals run by St John of God Healthcare and Ramsay Health. This vital service gives newborn babies the best chance of achieving full potential by getting essential early support, assistive devices and early intervention.

Earbus Patron, Professor Harvey Coates AO, was the driving force behind Australia adopting neonatal hearing screening, hence Earbus' commitment to making this part of our service mix. Earbus provides ear health screening, treatment and surveillance with teams of doctors, audiologists, nurses and ENT (ear, nose and throat) specialists visiting children in community.

In total, over 12,500 children a year receive ear health services from the Foundation, making Earbus a leading provider of ear health services in terms of geographical reach and client throughput.

FROM OUR FOUNDERS

What we brought to the table was a combination of perspectives and expertise: Education (Teacher of the Deaf), Health (Nurse) and Allied Health (Audiologist).

When the initial funding for our program was approved we were overjoyed to finally be getting on the road. Then a dawning realisation that **we were to hit the ground running in four days and didn't have any clinical equipment for our first trip**. So we improvised in what was to become true Earbus fashion as we borrowed audiological equipment and loaned a computer to capture our data. Four days later we arrived in Kalgoorlie ready to start what was to be 4 years of travel together. Our little 'family' of three were in the Pilbara one week of every month, returned to Perth for a week and then headed to the Goldfields the following week. We'd return to Perth and repeat. For 11 months of the year.

Exhaustion was a constant but so was fun, enthusiasm and wonderful memories with amazing communities, children and families. From those first few trips, word started to spread and we had communities approach us weekly to visit their sites. Local people taught us local ways of working, linking us into family networks. **In some communities no child could initially pass a basic screening and hearing test**. Within a few months we would see the change start to happen and children start to get well. So much support from many agencies and people on the ground kept us going.

- *Dr Lara Shur*, Audiologist

The best teachers simply do what they do because they love kids, enjoy their company and want to help them flourish and grow. For four years, twice month - a week at a time - I had this amazing privilege.

When Earbus Foundation first hit the road in February 2014 we spent a day at Laverton DHS screening and treating some diabolical ear issues. When we got back to our accommodation in Leonora, Lara and Dee spread all the paperwork on the floor and started sorting it out and getting the next day's lists ready. I thought "Hmmm, **if we're going to eat tonight I'm probably cooking...**" And so began 4 years of provisions shopping, cooking over 1400 meals, driving around 45,000km a year, often on dusty, corrugated roads and sitting alongside Lara and Dee entering data into what became our clinical database. Ah, the glamour and prestige of being Earbus CEO!

My respect and admiration for my two colleagues and friends as they treated torn eardrums, foreign bodies and timid children with humour, panache and professionalism will be with me always. And these remarkable children who put up with my infantile "magic" tricks meant to distract and relax them, who trusted us and welcomed us month after month. The Ancient Greeks defined happiness as 'the full use of one's power in the pursuit of excellence'. **These have been indisputably the happiest and most satisfying years of my professional life.**

- *Paul Higginbotham*, Teacher of the Deaf

Wilferd Peterson said "Walk with the dreamers, the believers, the courageous, the cheerful, the planners, the doers, the successful people with their head in the clouds, and their feet on the ground. Let their spirit ignite a fire within you to leave this world a better place than when you found it."

When we began pioneering Earbus Foundation, something magic happened. The synergy of our shared passion and the respect for each other's skills and knowledge created so much early success and momentum. We were beyond privileged to sit down and yarn with decades-wise Elders and Knowledge Holders to map strong local pathways for their children. We all wanted the same things - healthy children with strong language and hearing, learning well at school and thriving in their local community.

Communities responded quickly by getting their mobs engaged. They consented with this co-designed model and turned up for surgeries every time, often over very long distances. High percentage rates in these two key areas were not only unprecedented with local regional hospitals but were also pivotal to our early success. **It would have been impossible in those early days to have foreseen the incredible impact of our efforts** in terms of numbers of children seen, communities impacted and lives transformed.

Though often tired, we never lost sight of the prize of seeing every child, at every site whenever possible, whatever it took. Seeing well children with restored hearing was - and remains after all these years - our greatest reward. Where passion meets purpose, the force for change is formidable.

- Dee Parker, Nurse Audiometrist

"Exhaustion was a constant but so was fun, enthusiasm and wonderful memories with amazing communities, children and families."

**Dr Lara Shur
Audiologist & Co-founder**



Dee Parker, Lara Shur & Paul Higginbotham



WALKING TOGETHER

From the beginning, Earbus has placed the recognition of Aboriginal knowledge and expertise at its heart.

Earbus has aspired since its earliest days to be a model of best practice in cross-cultural collaboration. A true and lasting partnership with Aboriginal people at every level.

So much of what we now know about delivering effective ear health services into regional and remote communities has come from watching, listening and learning how each community works.

Every community is distinct and local, with different strengths, resources, challenges and needs. Our aim is to ensure Earbus always aligns with what each community wants and needs so that the service embeds with community expectations.

American Anthropologist Professor William Lempert, observing Earbus in the Kimberley, noted "Earbus Foundation holds honourable relationships with Aboriginal communities and families." Guidance from Aboriginal Elders, health workers and community members has been crucial in forging strong and deeply respectful relationships.

This local action approach includes adorning each regional Earbus with artwork from local children, the first of which was for the Kimberley region. All of the buses built since have featured a beautiful canvas of unique artwork by local children. Wagyls, turtles, canola fields and more remind us where we are across the vast landscape of Western Australia.

Our first ever Earbus was generously funded by Rotary Club of Karrinyup as a 40th Anniversary project. It was a proud and exciting moment when then new Minister for Health and Deputy Premier, the Hon. Roger Cook launched the purpose-built mobile ear health clinic as one of his first official duties of 2017. Our 7th Earbus will hit the road in the East Pilbara, rolling out of South Hedland in early 2024.

In our current Board, our Aboriginal Directors Sue Beath, Dr Carol Dowling and Dr Julie Owen offer valuable insights and guidance based on their lived experiences, backgrounds and qualifications. A highly skilled and highly valued part of the Earbus landscape.

Originally, the Office of Aboriginal Health under Dr Ken Wyatt's leadership shaped the Earbus service model, making primary care the centrepiece of services and support for children in regional and remote communities.

We are proud of the strong partnerships we have forged with schools and community organisations across WA – valuable collaborations built on trust. Trust has been the cornerstone of our ability to address the complex challenges of ear health in remote and regional areas.

Earbus Foundation acknowledges the lands on which we listen, learn and live across our vast state.

MILESTONES

- 2013** Earbus Foundation of Western Australia was founded
Voted best presentation for keynote address at National Indigenous Health Conference (Cairns)
First staff member hired
- 2014** SGIO Community Grant Scheme supplies essential equipment
Commencement of partnership with Wirraka Maya Aboriginal Health Service in the Pilbara and Bega Garnbirringu Aboriginal Medical Service in Kalgoorlie
- 2015** AngloGold Ashanti Australia becomes first corporate sponsor
Earbus wins Newborn Hearing Screening contract servicing WA's private maternity hospitals
Partnership announced with Starlight Children's Foundation
- 2016** Earbus deliver first ENT surgery list in Esperance in 16 years
Rotary Karrinyup fund the build of the first Earbus mobile ear health clinic
Hear Today Paediatric Audiology Clinic launched
- 2017** Microsoft and Earbus develop high-end ear health data management platform via PowerBI
WA State Budget announced in support of Earbus Kimberley Program
Royal Australasian College of Surgeons provide a bus to be fitted out for the South West
- 2018** Staff numbers grow to 32
Earbus expands into Kimberley and South West regions
Minara Community Foundation and AngloGold Ashanti fund Earbus for the Goldfields
- 2019** Earbus commence Ears2Learn pilot program with Connecting Community for Kids
Western Force names Earbus beneficiary of its Indigenous Appreciation Match
Earbus visits Edmund Rice in Bindoon for the first time
- 2020** Earbus expands into Perth Metro and Inland Pilbara regions, adds two new Earbuses to fleet
Establishment of Harvey Coates Research Scholarship at Griffith University
5,200 children seen in regional and remote communities
- 2021** Newman Earbus mobile ear health clinic hits the road
Earbus delivers 22,000 occasions of care
Staff numbers grow to 50
- 2022** Earbus receives first ever Telethon grant
Karalundi services commence
Earbus Foundation passes 100,000 occasions of care
- 2023** Outreach program expands to Carnarvon
Albamarle Hatch JV fund the build of an Earbus for the Pilbara East
Earbus celebrates 10 years of operation



THE EARBUS LOGO

The Earbus logo was creatively designed by Scott Higginbotham who in the early days of Earbus – before paid employees – provided pro bono design and marketing expertise to shape brand development. This included logo, letterheads, business cards, banners and other collateral.

Inspiration for the design was a NZ circular jade tiki from Hokitika – very apt as the Earbus idea was imported from New Zealand by Professor Harvey Coates AO, who thought it would translate across the Tasman and be successful in Aboriginal communities.

Scott's design gradually transitions the colours from the pindan earth tones of the Kimberley and Pilbara to the blues of the Southern Ocean, capturing the reach of Earbus across Western Australia.

The hand drawn logo also evokes vehicle wheels turning as well as the shape of the human hearing organ – the cochlear.

Scott became an Earbus staff member before leaving to pursue commercial work as an award-winning comic book designer. His logo design endures, now adorning buses, signage, uniforms and websites.



earbus
foundation of WA
Hear Today, Shine Tomorrow



THE EARBUS IS HERE!

"When we approach a school the kids get really excited. You can hear them giggling and yelling from the classrooms - it's the Earbus! The Earbus is here!"

This sentiment is shared with just about everyone who meets an Earbus staff member. Each of our purpose-built buses are vividly adorned with artwork from school children in the local area.

Bush tucker, grass trees, rainbow serpents, boomerangs. Turtles, tortoises, crabs, lizards. Rocks, waterways, birds, wallabies. From the imagination of an Aboriginal child come the most precious drawings. Some draw cultural totems. Others draw what they see around them. Each one is a masterpiece.

When funding for a bus is donated, the search for artwork begins almost as soon as the search for a vehicle. Local teachers encourage students of all ages to enter the competition to have their work on the finished bus. A designer then takes those hand drawn treasures and digitises them before applying them to a mock up of the bus - no one wants a kangaroo without ears thanks to a rogue window!

When the kids see their work on the finished bus they are speechless. There's a sense of ownership among the community - this is 'their Earbus' - and pride of their totems, their home, their favourite places, displayed on such a large, mobile canvas.





JARRAH'S STORY

Jarrah was 4 years old when he first came to the Earbus.

He was a tiny little boy and at the very first appointment he had with the team, he climbed up the windows of the room where audiology testing was to take place – literally. Both nurse and audiologist worked to get him down from the bars. He then proceeded to sit under the table and wouldn't come out until he was given a banana to eat (encouragement, not bribery!)

Jarrah's kindergarten teacher was beside herself. She had said she couldn't contain him in class and found him to be a disruptive element in the classroom. She confessed that she found herself shouting at him most days as he never seemed to be listening to her instructions. The Earbus team were unsurprised to diagnose a moderate hearing loss in both of Jarrah's ears. His speech and language was delayed in both English and his home language. And his older brother had exactly the same moderate hearing loss. What both boys needed was surgery to insert grommets and hopefully restore their hearing.

At that time, Jarrah and his brother were both living away from family. Trying to obtain informed consent for surgery took several months of meetings and discussions with family members as well as carers. The Earbus team also worked with both boys so that they understood what was happening.

Perseverance in following up led to consent for surgery. Grommets were successfully fitted for both children. Within a week, we heard from their teachers as well as family about the change in the behaviour of both Jarrah and his brother. No longer distracting their schoolmates and frustrating their teachers, the boys had begun actively participating in class!

**"I can hardly believe
he's the same child.
He's gone from
disruptive behaviour
to star pupil!"**

Jarrah's Teacher



ACHIEVEMENTS

- 2016** Prime Super WA Community Group of the Year Award
- 2017** AIM WA West Business Pinnacle Awards - Emerging Business Excellence
- 2018** Telstra Business Awards - Social Change Maker (WA) Award
- 2019** Impact100 WA Major Grant Award Winner
Impact100 Fremantle Major Grant Award Winner
- 2020** Sunsuper Dreams of a Better World National Winner
Australian Charity Awards - Outstanding Achievement Winner
- 2021** HESTA Excellence Awards - Outstanding Organisation in Allied Health
Australian Charity Awards - Outstanding Achievement Winner
- 2022** Australian Charity Awards - Outstanding Achievement Winner
- 2023** Pilbara For Purpose Awards – Most Outstanding Large Organisation Winner
Telstra Best of Business Awards – Championing Health Finalist



A DECADE OF BRILLIANCE

**“The Earbus program is
a godsend for families”**

**Sue Beath
Kariyarra Elder**



“Earbus Foundation has provided us with early detection of any ear issues, support with the management of chronic ear issues and the detection and treatment of ear infections, which are highly prevalent at our school. This support has directly resulted in improved outcomes for our students and greater achievement in the classroom.”

**Peter Freeman, Principal
Moorditj Noongar Community College**

“Earbus has had a tremendous impact on the ear health of our students’ speech and oral language, particularly in the early years. We have seen the positive impact in educational outcomes specifically in phonemic awareness. The team that visit our school are professional and provide outstanding care to students and their families.”

**Sally Fowler, Principal
East Kalgoorlie Primary School**



“I unequivocally view the role of Earbus as essential in helping to improve the lives and future prospects, hopes and dreams of our students. I am personally very appreciative of this service and I look forward to our school’s ongoing partnership with Earbus.”

**Gareth Palmer, Principal
Esperance Primary School**

“The Earbus mob found that my child had limited hearing. I’m so glad I saw them so we can do something about it!”

**Parent
Pilbara Region**

“Earbus has filled a massive gap that previously existed in ear health. The team’s unwavering focus on good ear health translates to better educational outcomes for our children and the wider community.”

**Tegan Davis, Former Principal
Djidi Djidi Aboriginal School**

GRATEFUL THANKS

Earbus Foundation is proud of its connection to Aboriginal children, families and communities and the measurable changes that we have recorded in improved ear health in Aboriginal children. Our achievements are the result of collaboration and partnerships and we owe thanks to many agencies, sponsors and individuals who have been indispensable contributors and supporters over many years.

Aboriginal Medical Services and Corporations throughout the state have welcomed and supported us with facilities, personnel, advice and local knowledge. Deadly, you guys!

Our dedicated hard-working and resourceful staff, GPs, Nurse Practitioners and ENTs who have provided unflinching commitment and exceptional service. Their tireless and unselfish efforts and passion have been instrumental in the success of our programs.

Our wonderful schools, daycares, kindergartens, playgroups and early learning centres: by opening your doors and making us welcome you have allowed us to reach and treat thousands of Aboriginal children in hundreds of locations across the state.

Our sponsors and funders have made all of this possible: from government fundholders like Rural Health West to our commercial and industry supporters, of whom AngloGold Ashanti are our longest standing having backed us since 2015. All of you – large and small – are vital and valued.

Our program partners: Royal Flying Doctor Service, Starlight Children's Foundation, Connecting Community for Kids, Wanslea, health services and allied agencies who work alongside us and perform such important roles in many of our most remote and challenging locations.

Our current and previous Board members: your unwavering support has played a pivotal role in growing and safeguarding Earbus Foundation and our Mission.

The many volunteers and interns who have given their energy and time to Earbus: this has allowed us to devote more of our resources and funds to families and communities across the state.

Finally, the inspirational children and families around our state who welcome us into their communities: thank you for trusting us, welcoming us and working with us to get children well.

WE COULDN'T HAVE DONE THIS WITHOUT YOU!