



Newcastle, 13 December 2019

## **SURF'S UP FOR KIDS WITH ASD**

Newcastle-based charity Surfing the Spectrum is extending its community-based surf therapy initiative for people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), thanks to a \$15,000 grant from waste and water management company SUEZ.

Surfing the Spectrum works with local community groups to offer children with ASD free surfing lessons. Over the last two years, the organisation has provided 350 families with access to inclusive ocean-focused physical activity, aiming to lessen the social inequity and exclusion commonly experienced.

The grant will enable the expansion of the initiative into more communities along the NSW coast, with four new locations over the 2019/20 summer season. It will also assist in funding the delivery of a world-first evidence-based training program, designed to build capacity in local groups to offer ASD-sensitive surfing and ocean safety education all year round.

Occupational therapist Aimee Blacker, who is Co-Founder and Director of Surfing the Spectrum, said that the funds will allow for additional events to be delivered from Gerringong in the state's south up to Byron Bay in the north, with more than 600 families set to benefit.

"There is high demand for an inclusive surf-based activity that is intrinsically motivating, encourages physical activity and targets social inclusion, water safety and ocean awareness," Ms Blacker said.

"SUEZ's support is crucial in not only extending the reach of our events, but in enabling us to build capacity in more communities for year-round participation by training instructors in local surf schools to teach people with autism effectively," she added.

Andrew Humphries, Northern Region Manager, SUEZ presented a commemorative plaque to Ms Blacker at Nobby's Beach on Friday 13 December, congratulating Surfing the Spectrum on its unique approach to developing more inclusive and neurodiverse communities.

"This initiative is a wonderful example of the power of communities to create meaningful opportunities for those who may otherwise miss out," Andrew said.

"It is an exciting way for people living with ASD to enjoy physical activity, learn new skills and connect with others while gaining a greater appreciation for our coastal environments," he added.

"We'd also like to congratulate Surfing the Spectrum on promoting their events as plastic free."

The project also contributes to several of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, including reducing inequalities, creating sustainable cities and communities, and promoting awareness of marine pollution and water conservation.

In the last six years, the SUEZ Community Grants program has provided close to \$1 million in funding to community organisations and projects across Australia that help communities and the environment thrive.

Visit [www.suezcommunitygrants.com.au](http://www.suezcommunitygrants.com.au) to learn more about the SUEZ Community Grants program and the successful applicants and projects.

# Ends

**Press contact:**

**SUEZ Media Office on 02 8775 5527**

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