

# Emma Thorp



Emma Thorp is a digital and mixed media artist who works with acrylics and coloured pencil on paper. Having graduated Latrobe University with a Bachelor of Fine Art, Emma moved away from her first love of printmaking and embraced drawing, enjoying the intimate nature of working with pencil. She finds the precise nature of it extremely rewarding, taking solace in an area over which she can have complete control – often the opposite of her daily life. Favouring sharp, high contrast images, she uses layering techniques reminiscent of printmaking in her drawings. She has been living in Queensland for 10 years, the past 6 of those years on the Fraser Coast. The bulk of Emma's work is self-narrative, often incorporating her family and the beautiful natural environment of Hervey Bay, Queensland. She also enjoys creating botanical drawings of the plants in her garden.

# early

My son Alby was born at 26 weeks and 3 days (at that stage every day counts) gestation. He was born on October 8th 2010, his full term due date would have been January 9 2011.

When he was born, Alby weighed 1100 grams (2 lbs 4 oz), fortunately a good weight for his age. He had many of the typical setbacks that extremely premature babies have, jaundice, anaemia, eye problems, brain haemorrhage, heart issues and breathing issues, but battled and became stronger and after 78 days between the Mater Mothers' Brisbane and Toowoomba Base Hospital Special Care, Alby was able to come home.

Early is a mixed media works on paper exhibit that chronicles the 8 years since Alby's birth and his diagnosis with Autism and ADHD.

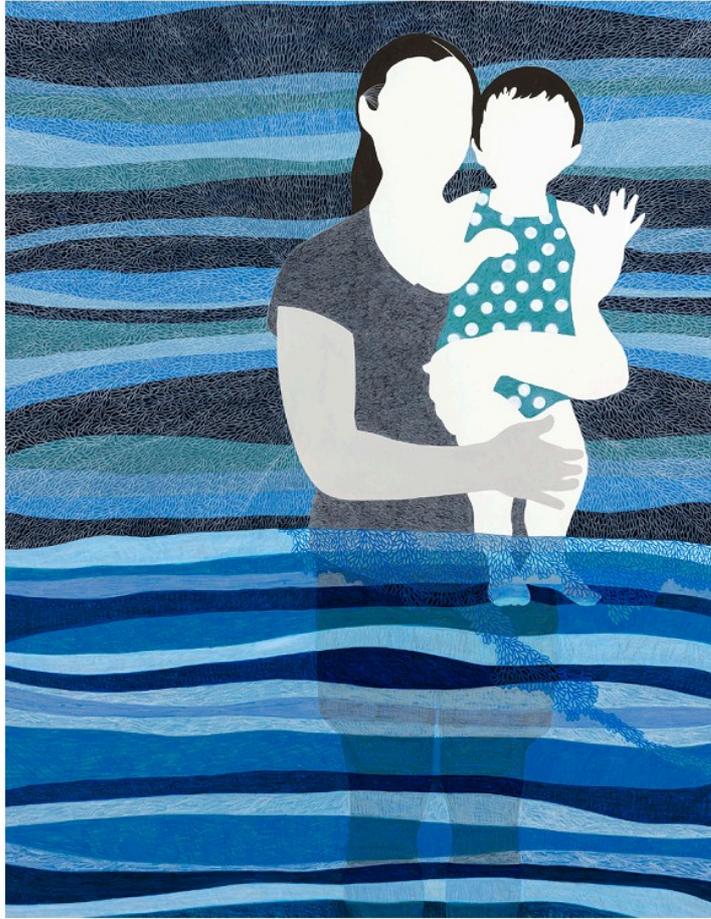
It is my hope that with this exhibition I can give people a glimpse into a world that can often be very insular, private and all-consuming. The lives of families living with children who were premature and or have special needs. Parents of children who are requiring ongoing therapies and interventions in the continuing struggle to enable their children to thrive, succeed and be included. I am also honoring the heroes in our community who work tirelessly alongside those families to ensure the best possible outcomes for the future.



Emma Thorp

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## “Swimming in Doubt” 2018

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

On the morning of the day that my son was born, I had been at a swimming lesson with my daughter. I knew that I didn't feel quite right, but I put it down to hauling around a toddler and my advancing pregnancy. Looking back to that day makes me question everything. Why didn't I listen to my body? Could his early birth have been prevented? Useless questions that do not change anything but bolster my Mother's guilt and the belief that whatever we do for our children is never enough. I know that is ridiculous, but we feel it anyway. So here I am at my daughters swimming lesson with hundreds of seeds of doubt swirling around me.



## “Just drop me at Emergency” 2017

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

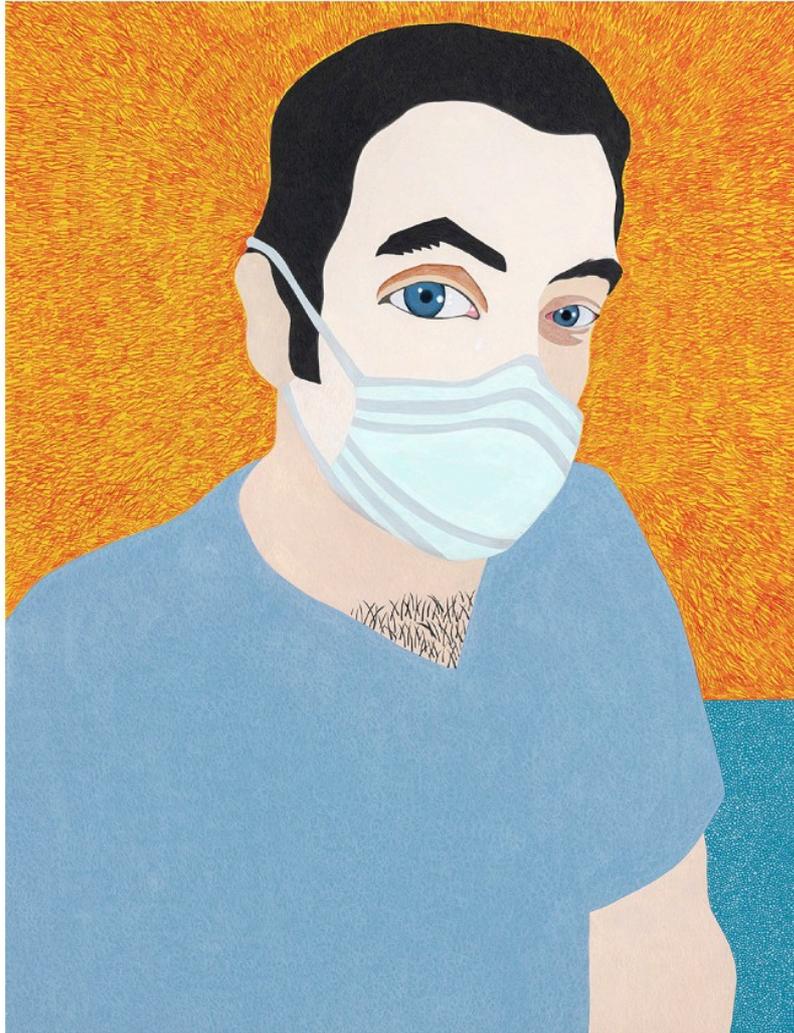
I started to have some cramping on the way back from my daughter's swimming lesson. When I got home, I called the hospital and they said I should come in to get checked out. I woke my husband Phil, who had just finished a night shift in the ICU and asked him to take me to the hospital to get checked out. My cramping steadily increased as we drove and I said, to a surprised and white knuckled husband, “I think you should drop me at Emergency and go and park the car”. “Really?” was his reply and I said “Yeah, Really”.



## **"First Portrait of a Mother and Child" 2017**

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

After my first child was born overdue and in a routine fashion, this is not how I envisioned my second birth to be. Alby was born spontaneously in a corridor on a hospital gurney whilst I was being rushed to theatre for an emergency cesarean that became no longer necessary. I watched as they tried to resuscitate this limp, shiny red, wisp of a boy and grieved for us all.



## “Why So Sad Dr?” 2017

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

My husband was a second year intern at the hospital when Alby was born. He spent my 3 hours or so of labor trying to entertain our toddler daughter. When it was declared that I needed an emergency caesarian, he was whisked from the room and the nurses looked after our daughter. He arrived in the theatre just after Alby arrived in the world. His tears caused confusion in his colleagues who were unaware that this woman and child were his family.



## **“The Surrogate 1:1” 2019**

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

Alby's surrogate mother was tubing and surgical greens. Every time I looked at him struggling in that little box, I saw my failure. Using his hospital measurements, I was able to draw him in 1:1 scale. This is how big he was when he was born. He was red and shiny like this too.



## “But for the Machines” 2017

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.

Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

As per the title.

But for the machines, Alby would not be alive.



## “Grateful Ghosts in a Hamburger House” 2017

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.

Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

After a few days of driving back and forth from Toowoomba to Brisbane (a 5 hour round trip), we were able to secure accommodation at Ronald McDonald House in Brisbane. We were grateful, hollow people in a house surrounded by highways. I have no idea what we would have done without them.



## “Denial and Provision” 2017

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

Here I am expressing milk in the bathroom at Ronald McDonald House. We bought a baby gate from home to keep Olive away from the equipment. At that time, my milk was all that I was providing for my son. I knew it was important, but I resented that machine.

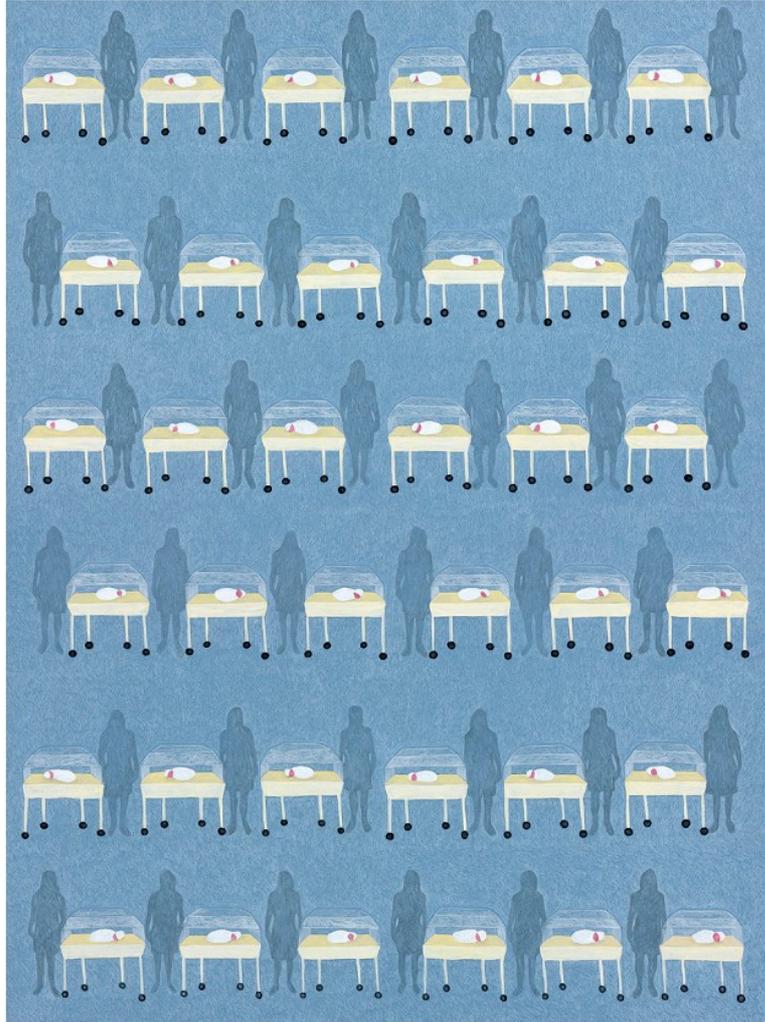
My with-me-all-the-time, co-sleeping baby was locked away from me. Sometimes she cried for me, sometimes she begged me to play, I would say, “It’s OK baby, I’ll be finished soon. Soon”. She spent hours and hours at the hospital, stuck in her stroller. I know that all mothers and siblings must adjust to a new baby, but this was a huge change, EVERYTHING was different. She coped beautifully, but I didn’t want her to have to.



## **“Saving a child feels a lot like losing a husband”**

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

Apparently, 84% of marriages of parents with special needs children break down. I cannot relay how tough a time this was for us and our marriage. I had a young daughter who needed me, a husband who missed me and a baby in a box that I felt drawn to. I felt like I was been torn in so many directions and doing nothing well.



## “Awkward Sentinel 36/78” 2018

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

This is me and every parent like me. Hovering.  
Feeling helpless and like an extra burden to the nursing  
staff. But still unable to convince myself that leaving is OK.



## “Siblings” 2018

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

Olive taking a peek at her baby brother through the incubator door. Not your typical meeting of siblings where a bundle of blankets containing a baby brother or sister is carefully placed on your lap while your parents look on adoringly. She didn't touch him until he came home from the hospital. She didn't touch him for 78 Days.



## “Bags” 2018

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.

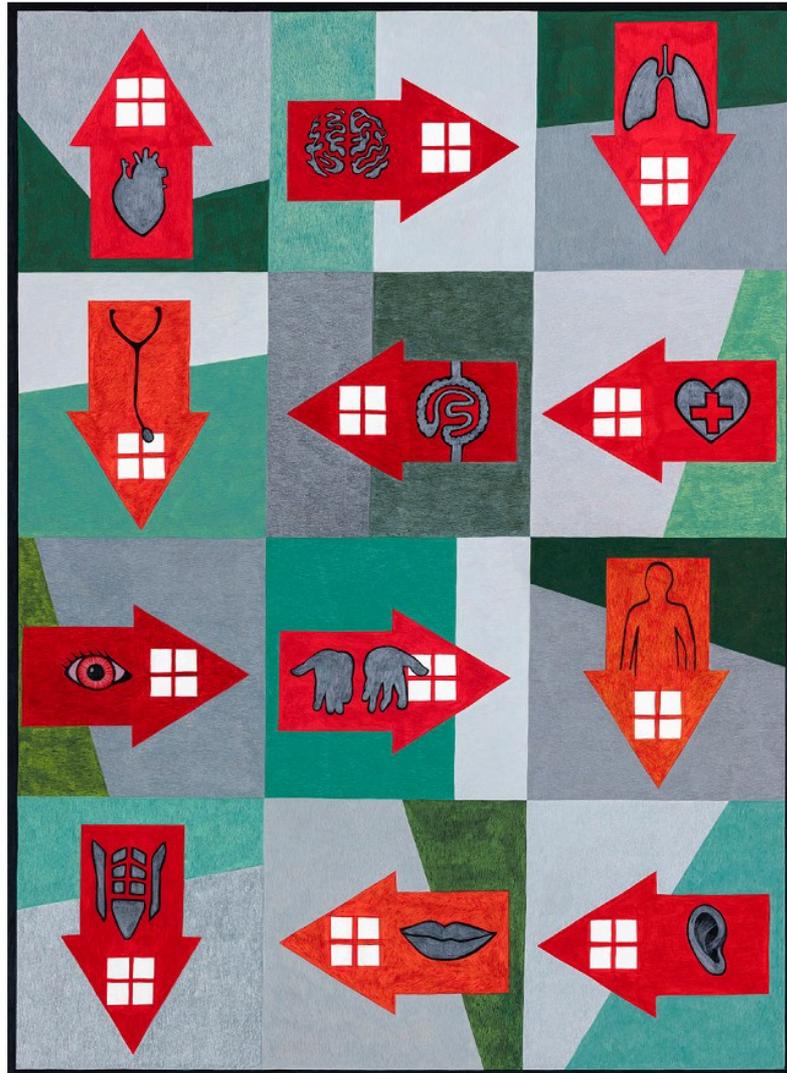
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

Ziplock. When Alby was born they put him in a Ziplock bag to try to retain his body heat.

Milk Bags. Expressing every 4 hours was exhausting.

Blood bag=Blood Transfusion

My eye Bags.



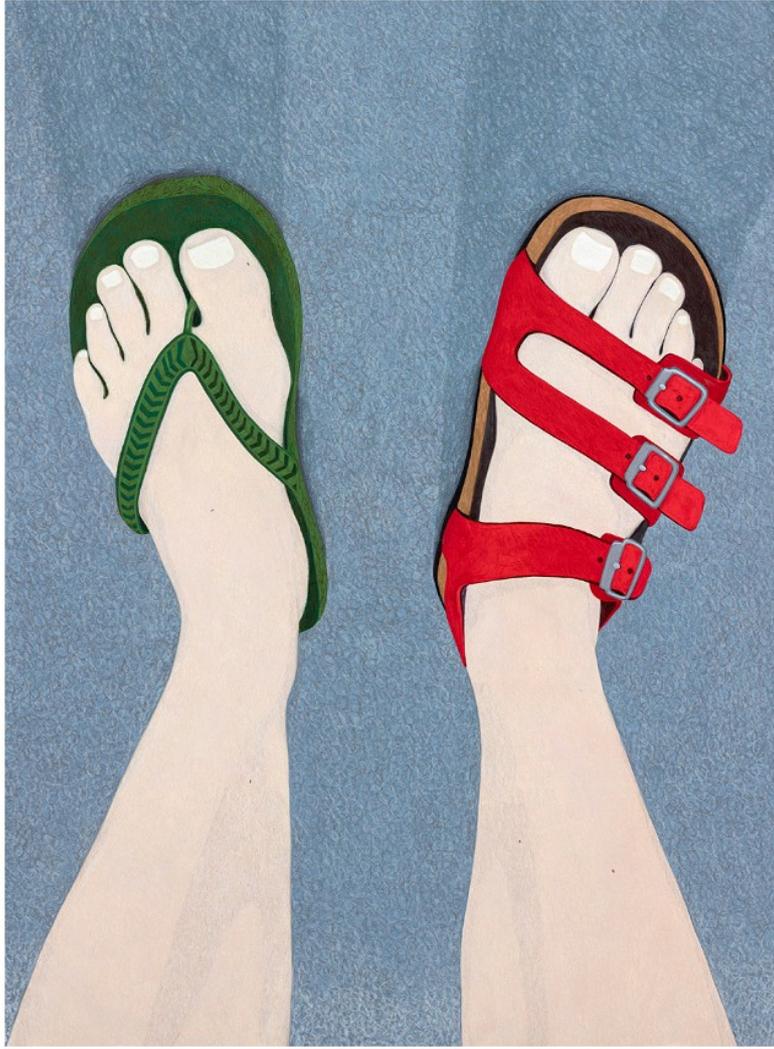
## “It takes a village of Medical Professionals” 2019

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.

Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

Cardiologist, Psychologist, ENT (Otorhinolaryngologist),  
Paediatrician, Gastroenterologist, Nurse,  
Ophthalmologist, Physiotherapist, Dermatologist,  
Occupational Therapist, Speech Therapist, Audiologist.

Thank you All.



## **“ Getting by but barely” 2018**

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

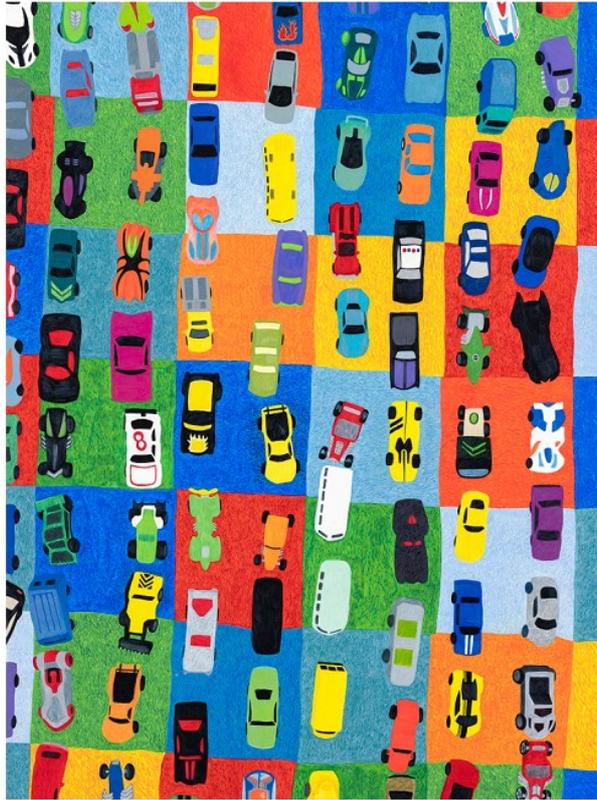
Exhausted and geographically isolated and proud of myself for having two shoes on.  
As a Mother of young children you accept that you come last and are ok with that.



### **"The Resigned Baby" 2017**

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

A continuous barrage of testing and therapies had left my son used to hospitals. Here Alby was having a Cardiologist check on his heart murmur. He sat patiently while all the monitors were connected. He looked up at me with wide watery eyes but did as asked and remained still. I had one of those parent "how did we get here moments" thinking this child should be wriggling and crying. He should not be looking at me with reassurance and the resignation that this was his lot in life.



## “Stereotypical Behaviours” 2018

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

Alby was born so prematurely that his young life was a constant game of catch up. Extreme prematurity causes many developmental delays and made it very difficult to determine the reasons for his behaviours. Was he just playing catch up or were there other factors in his frustrations and “quirks”?

Alby is not an obsessive child, he does not have a particular interest but ever since he has been able, he has had something/anything in his hand. On this particular day, when Alby lined up his cars, I thought absolutely nothing of it, apart from being thrilled that he was doing so well with his fine motor skills. It was only after Alby's Autism diagnosis that I looked back on this time and thought “Ahhh”.



## **“An Unfortunate end to a Playdate” 2018**

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

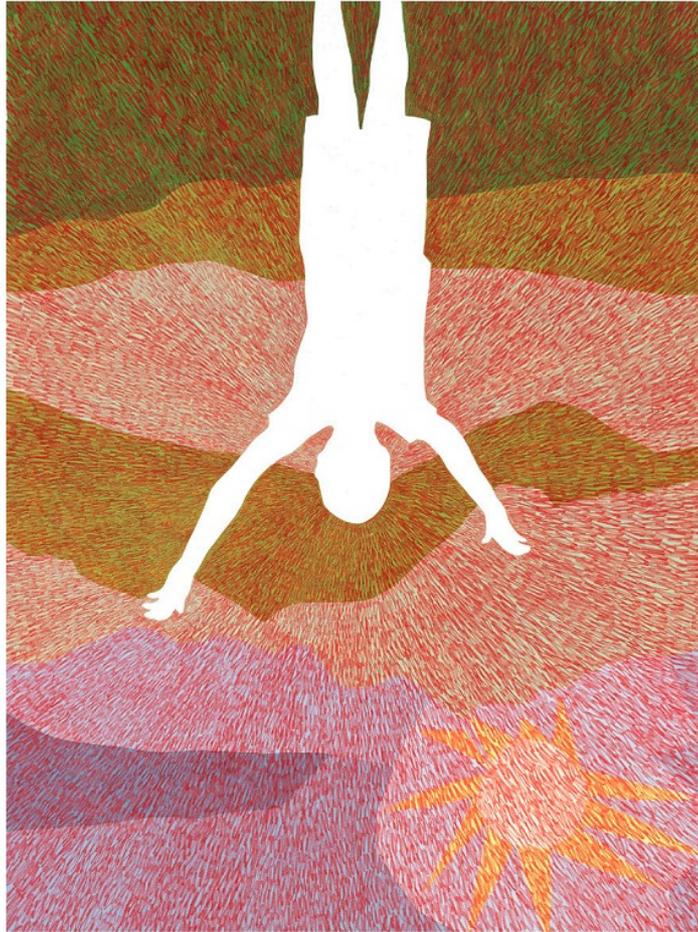
I took 4 year old Alby with me when I picked my daughter from a playdate. He was extremely heightened when he entered a new house full of new people and animals. And stairs, LOTS of stairs. After being told not to run near the dog, he did, and was bowled over. He got up, laughed and said “I want to do it again!” As we were leaving, against my advice, he ran down the stairs and then climbed up on their car, jumped around and wouldn't come down. I was mortified and apologetic. The Mum was very understanding and calm. After chasing him around, I finally got a completely oblivious Alby into his car seat and he asked when we could go back. I didn't answer him, I was too busy wondering how we could get the help that we needed.



## “ Tablet” 2019

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

Firstly, no parent wants to medicate their child. By the time Alby started Kindergarten, we knew that there were serious issues that needed to be addressed. We started the testing processes for Alby and it was determined that he has ADHD and Autism. Alongside many therapies, we reluctantly started Alby on medication just prior to him starting school. The difference was immediate and amazing. Alby could sit and eat with us, he could concentrate at school. He was not a zombie. His medication has allowed him to thrive and succeed.



## **“No Tablet” 2019**

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

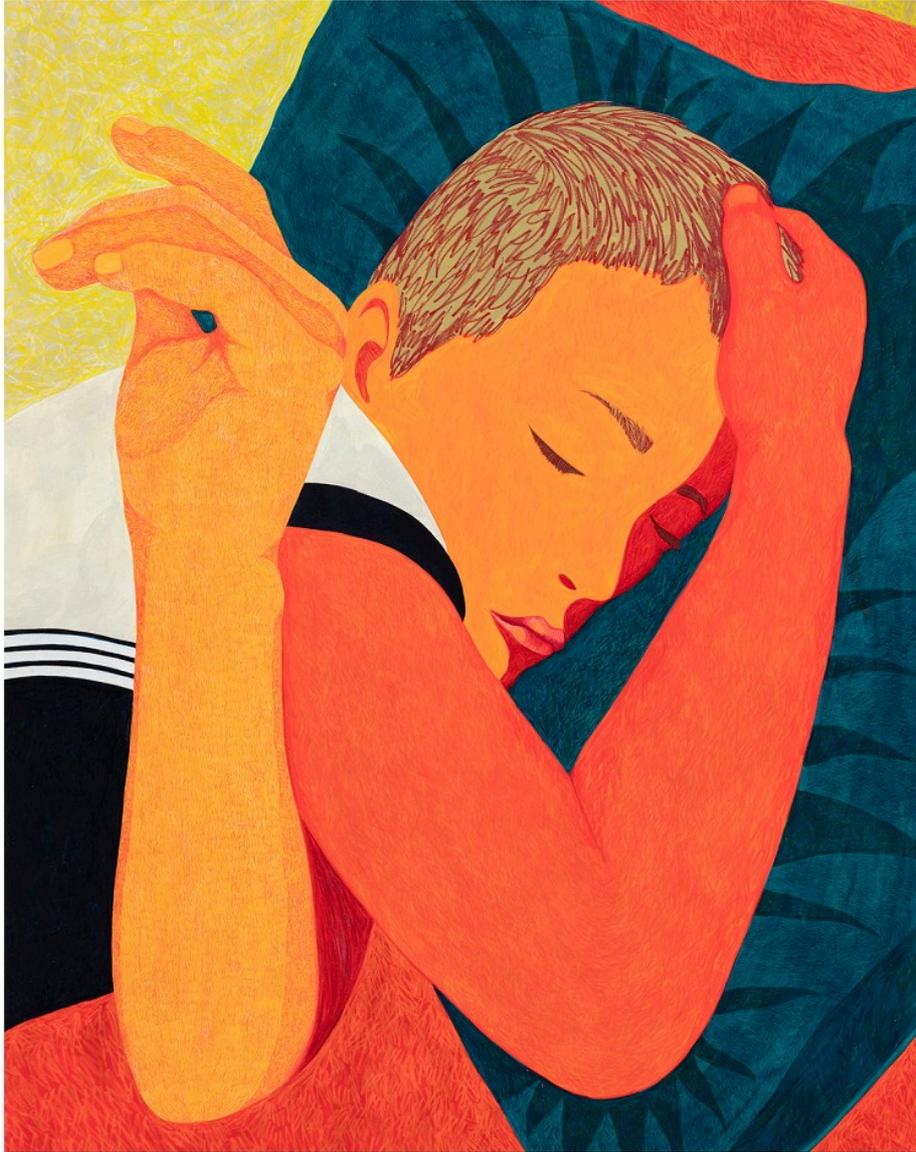
Alby is always upside down. He doesn't sit on the couch; he stands on it. He stands up at the table to eat meals. When I try to get him to focus on something it is near impossible. Here he is depicted in exactly the same environment as in the previous artwork “Tablet”, but unable to enjoy it and confused about why he is always getting in trouble for something that is out of his control.



## “Nonjudgmental love” 2019

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

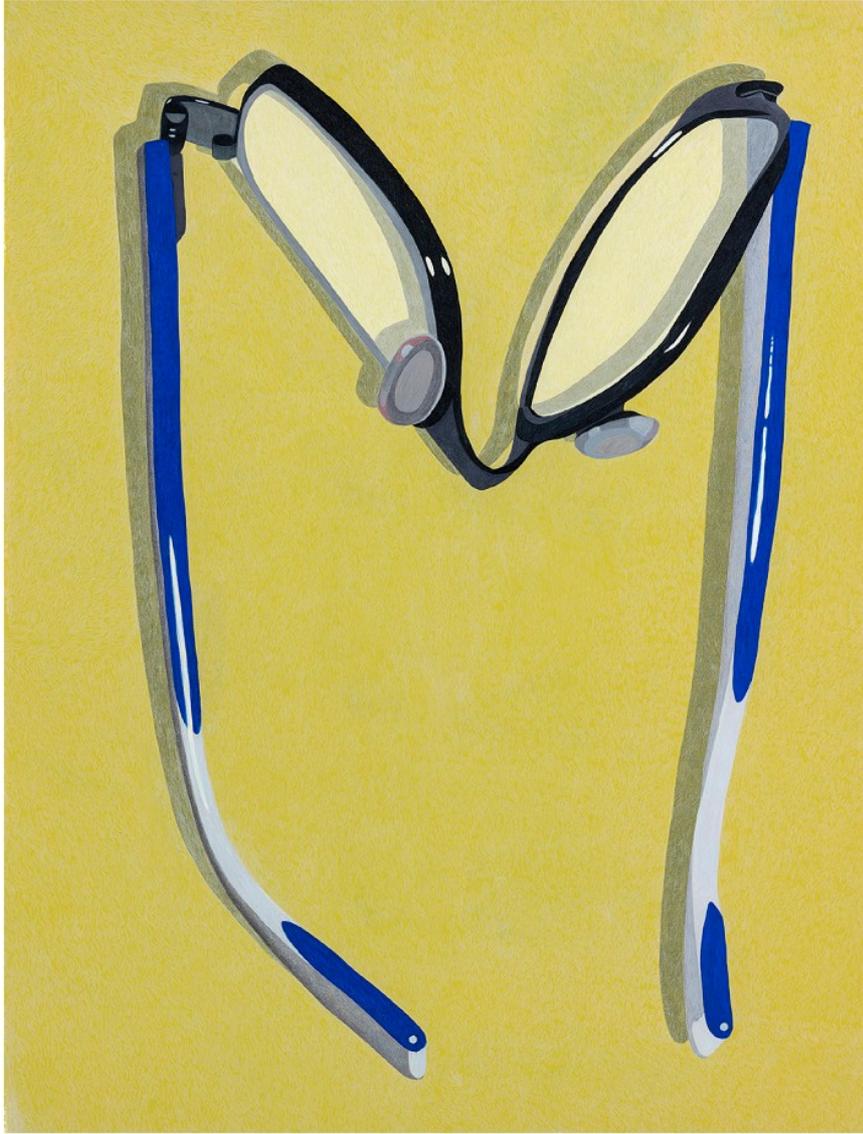
Alby and his dog Penny.  
They both have energy to burn.  
She is always happy to play any of his games.  
Penny never complains about the constantly changing  
rules that Alby makes during their games.



## “Intermission for a restless mind” 2018

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

Alby at rest. He struggles to get to sleep, rolling around, singing to himself. But when he finally gets there he sleeps deeply. And each night when I turn off his nightlight, I fall in love a little bit more.



### **“M is for Meltdown” 2018**

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

I thought it poignant that these glasses had been bent into a letter M when I found them hidden in a draw. It made sense that they drew Alby's ire. They were close by and he had been in meltdown. We have decided to wait a while before we try glasses again.



**“A varied diet full of mainly crunchy but always non-touching foods” 2019**

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

Food Sensitivities are very common in Austistic children. Alby's sensory seeking draws him to crunchy foods. I call the food I prepare for Alby “Children's Tappas”; little separate tastes of everything. We are still working at having the brownie and the ice cream in the same bowl.



## “Ready for School” 2018

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

Each day before Alby goes to school I ask “What have you got for your pockets?” If I don’t ask him, he will run around the house at the last minute and get very upset that he can’t find what he wants. The items Alby puts in his pockets offer him a measure of security and lessen his anxiety about school. They also operate as a bridge to interaction with his peers, who ask “What have you got in your pockets today Alby?” My Mum had to sew the pocket linings to the bottom of his shorts so that the pockets didn’t hang out of his short legs because they were so full.



## “At the Movies” 2018

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

Alby loves going to the movies, especially if we all go together. He gets uncomfortable with romantic or embarrassing scenes in movies. During those times he sits on the floor and plays on his iPad. I tap him on the shoulder when those scenes are over, and he happily goes back to watching the movie. Being prepared is the name of the game.



## “Connecting through sharing a Passion ” 2019

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

My Father has managed to foster a close relationship with Alby by embracing his love of Nerf Guns. Alby loves these guns, he asks for them for rewards for blood tests, for birthdays, Christmas and just because. They are one of his passions. When Autistic children want to share their passions with you, it is their attempt at showing you they care. My Dad comes to visit a few times a year. Each time before he arrives, Alby loads up all of his guns and hides them around the house. Quite often my Dad has already been shot before he even gets out of the car.



## “Colour Run” 2019

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

Alby's school was advertising a colour run. Alby was keen and I was wary. He wore a white shirt, to emphasize the colour and safety glasses. The teacher recommended sunglasses but Alby decided to go that extra step. When it was Alby's turn to run, he ran very quickly and deftly evaded all the colour stations, only to realise at the finish line that he had no colours on his shirt. I watched his excitement evaporate and his mood fall. I quickly searched around for some help. Through the clouds of colour who should appear like an angel but Mrs Tyson, Alby's favourite learning enrichment aide. I quickly explained the situation and she calmly took him back along the track to get more colour. He came back to me with a big grin only matched by Mrs Tyson's.



## “School Camp” 2019

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

School Camp. Two words that strike fear in the heart of any parent of a child with special needs.

“Where are we going? Where are we staying? Who will be in my tent? What are we eating?”

So many many questions and variables – in this case all addressed by Alby’s teacher. After an unsuccessful attempt to stay overnight at camp the previous year, we doubled down our efforts to make this one a success. Provisions were made for me to come at dinner time ( so that I could provide Alby a meal that he would eat), stay the night and leave after breakfast. I had my own tent just in case Alby needed me. He didn’t need me. Just knowing that I was there was enough. A huge victory for him, his teacher and me.



## **“Neither Baggage nor Burden” 2019**

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

We have held off on plane travel for a long time. Last year we took a trip to Canberra, two small flights about 3 hours in total. Alby did so well and was able to claim his rewards at the end of every flight. We did a lot of different of activities, all of which we had discussed at length with Alby. I was exhausted after it. We all were. He coped so well, but for now 3 hours of flying is definitely our limit. Once we arrived home we didn't see Alby for a few days whilst he decompressed.



## “Unboxable Boy” 2018

Acrylic Paint and Coloured Pencil on Saunders Waterford 300g/m.  
Image Size: 670 x 490 mm

To say I was shocked when Alby requested a Time Zone birthday party would be an understatement. After quizzing him about it multiple times and offering alternatives, he confirmed it was what he wanted. The day of his party was hot, I knew when he put on his furry jacket that he was anxious, but the jacket was enough to get him to his party. We didn't sing happy birthday or open the presents because he doesn't like the attention. One of his favourite amusements was the Wheel of Fortune, which made me quite emotional because his future is so unsure. Surviving and thriving at his party increased my confidence that his future is looking bright.

## Support Services:

From the time that Alby was born prematurely through his diagnosis with Autism and ADHD an array of incredible Non for Profit organisations have offered me wonderful advice and support. Being from a regional area, many of these supports have been by phone, but incredibly helpful non the less. Reach out if you have the need, you are not alone. Below are some of the organisations that have been helpful and supportive through out my journey.



### PIPA – Parents Helping Parents

PIPA (Preterm Infants Parents Association Inc.) is a peer to peer support group and charity. It is run entirely by volunteers and it is about parents helping parents. This has been PIPA's strength and the reason why it is Australia's longest running prem support group.

PIPA offers practical and emotional support to families of infants born preterm. It's goal is to raise awareness of premature birth and to provide understanding, support, information, encouragement and friendship to parents of preterm infants.

Established in Brisbane in 1980 it has provided support to families which starts whilst their infant is in the neonatal intensive or special care nursery soon after birth and continues for as many years as is necessary.

Many children born too soon will continue to face challenges in the future and parents will continue to benefit from PIPA's support in meeting the needs of their precious children. It's activities include: hospital visiting, parent support meetings, network of regional contacts, events such as the annual "prems in the park" picnic and celebration of World Prematurity Day, community education and representing the needs of prem families with government and hospital authorities.

facebook page [www.facebook.com/PIPAAssociation](http://www.facebook.com/PIPAAssociation),

**Phone; 1300 773 672**

Email: [contactus@pipa.org.au](mailto:contactus@pipa.org.au)



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life's little treasures  
foundation

*Supporting Families of Premature & Sick Babies*

## **Life's Little Treasures**

Established in 2005, Life's Little Treasures Foundation (LLTF) is Australia's foremost charity providing information and support to families with a premature or sick baby.

Working throughout the country, its mission is to ensure no family endures the difficult and life-changing experience of having a premature or sick baby without access to critical information and support. LLTF brings together leading health professionals, social workers, researchers and trained volunteers to offer products and services that reduce trauma and empower parents to make the best choices for their family. LLTF intimately understands the needs of parents and families and exists to guide them through their journey, from pregnancy and birth, through the hospital stay and transition home, into the early years of childhood and beyond.

Premature birth is the most common cause of sickness and death in newborn babies and the number of Australian babies born prematurely is increasing. Each year in Australia, 27,000 babies (7% of all births) are born prematurely and 5,000 babies (2% of all births) are born very prematurely (at least two months before their due date).

Having a child that is sick or premature can be a very traumatic roller-coaster ride and the Foundation strives to give families the support and assistance they need.

**Call 1300 697 736**

[www.lifeslittletreasures.org.au](http://www.lifeslittletreasures.org.au)



**Autism Queensland** is one of Australia's largest and longest serving providers of services for children and adults on the autism spectrum. Our highly skilled allied health and education professionals deliver specialised, evidence-informed services across Queensland from centres in Brisbane, Gladstone, Rockhampton, Mackay and Cairns. This comprehensive range of services includes allied health and diagnostic assessments, individual therapy, group therapy programs, early childhood intervention, adult programs, supported independent living, professional development and parent education, vocational and life skills programs. We also operate an accredited, independent school with three campuses. Autism Queensland aims to conduct and support research and promote evidence-informed practice to enhance the potential of individuals on the spectrum to achieve valued life outcomes.

[www.autismqld.com.au](http://www.autismqld.com.au)

## What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), also known as autism, is a neurodevelopmental disorder which affects the brain's growth and development. In most cases, the cause of ASD is unknown. Research suggests that there may be a genetic basis in many instances, although not all.

Autism affects an individual's ability and understanding of how to interact and communicate socially with others. They may also engage in repetitive behaviours and have difficulty coping with changes to routines or activities.

People on the autism spectrum can also respond in unusual ways to sensory input. For instance, they may be overly sensitive to loud noises, bright lights or unexpected touch, and may seek sensations such as touching or mouthing objects or body-rocking.

These social communication challenges, and difficulties coping with change and sensory differences, can lead to confusion, frustration, anxiety and difficult or unusual behaviour which are more pronounced in some situations than others.

ASD is a spectrum condition which means that, while all people on the spectrum share certain difficulties, this condition can present itself in a variety of ways and to varying extents.



Unpaid family carers come from all walks of life. Some carers have sole responsibility for caring, while others share it. Every caring situation is different. It can bring both joy and challenges. However, the one thing that all carers have in common- they give comfort, encouragement, and support to the person they care for.

The responsibilities of caring can impact the ability of a carer to have a normal life. Socialising, financial security, education and other opportunities that were part of everyday life can be diminished because of the challenges involved with family caring.

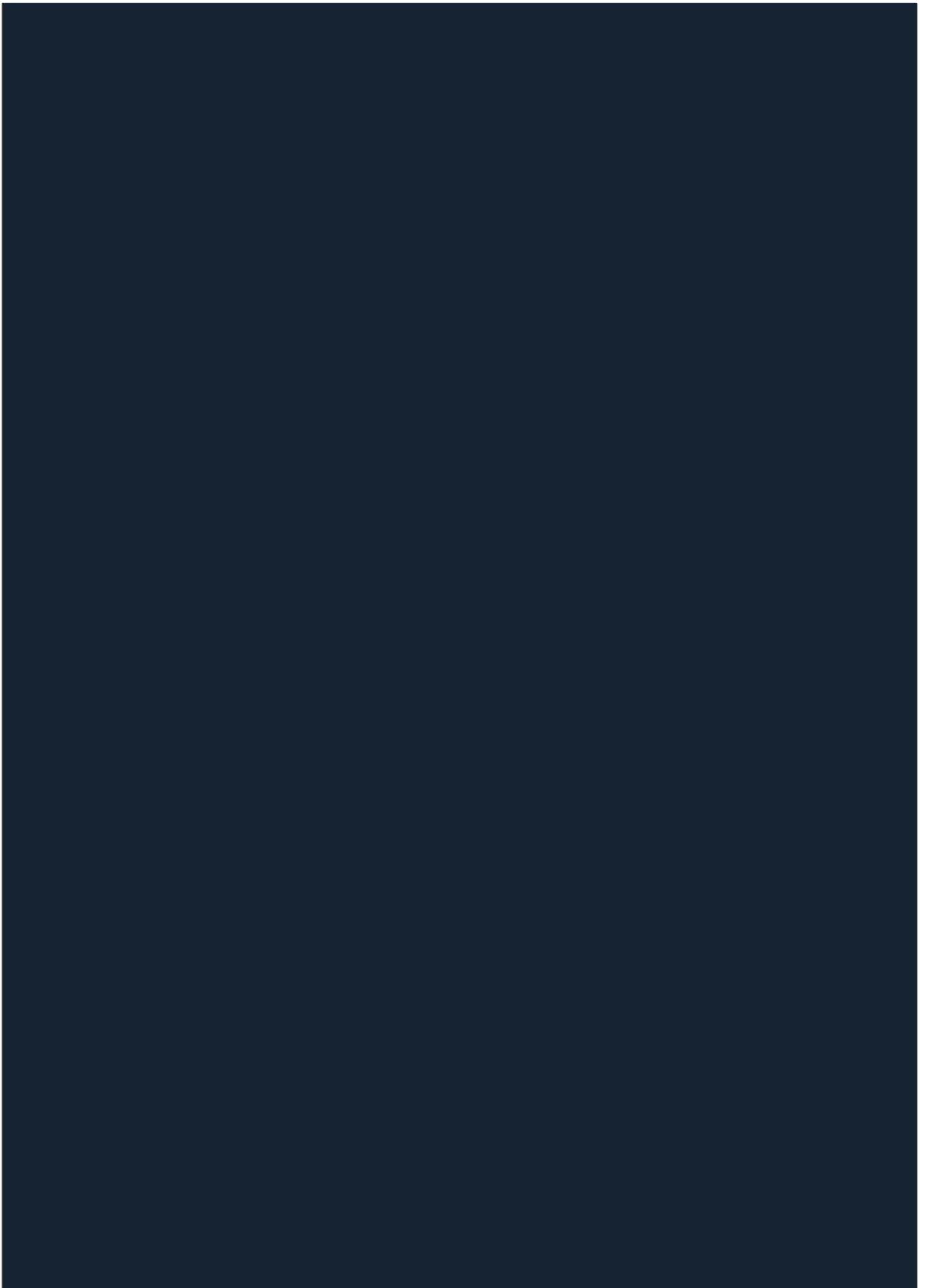
Additionally, a carer's own health and wellbeing can deteriorate as a result of their responsibilities. It is therefore essential that unpaid family carers receive effective support and recognition for their role. For 30 years, Carers Queensland has been working to advocate for equal rights, opportunities, and enhanced outcomes for caring families.

We work within and value our local community, responding to unmet need with care and respect, assisting those who are disconnected through high-quality personalised support.

Our objective is to ensure you achieve your goals, enhance your relationships, and can move forward with a life based on your own decisions and choices.

Carers Queensland,

**07 3900 8100**



why

Emma Thorp



Queensland  
Government



Fraser Coast  
REGIONAL COUNCIL

A cultural service of

The Regional Arts Development Fund (RADF) is a  
partnership between the Queensland Government  
and Fraser Coast Regional Council.