



## BGLS Strategic Plan

The Brisbane German Language School (BGLS) is a not-for-profit community organisation. Its mission is to **promote the language and culture of German-speaking countries** within the Brisbane and broader Southeast Queensland region.

### **Brief history of the BGLS**

The BGLS has a long and proud history. It started during the early 1960's when a group of German parents took the initiative to establish a school where their children and grandchildren could develop their reading and writing skills in their native language and become literate in the German language. This led to establishing the German Saturday School (Deutsche Sonnabend Schule Brisbane), which was founded by Elsa Armstrong, Walter Pein and Hans Woelken in 1963. Elsa Armstrong was the first coordinator and teacher of the school, Walter Pein the first president and Hans Woelken the first treasurer.

The school started with approximately 20 students and was located at St James School on Wickham Terrace, and later moved to St Brigid's in Red Hill. The German Saturday School moved from there to St Peters Lutheran College in Indooroopilly in early 1970, where it is still located.

In 2000, the Deutsche Sonnabend Schule Brisbane was renamed to Brisbane German Language School Inc. In 2003 the school began to offer adult classes.

Over the 40 years since then, the number of student enrolments have varied from year to year. In 1979 the number of enrolled students reached a high of 90 but gradually fell to 60 students by the early 1990s. The average enrolment remained steady at 40 - 45 students per year for much of the early 2000s.

### **The BGLS today**

The BGLS today continues to hold classes for both youth and adult students, mainly on a Saturday morning from St Peters Lutheran College. A variety of adult classes are also held at various venues around Brisbane during the week. Some youth and adult classes are also held online. There are currently between 80-90 students in total (50-60 youth and 30-40 adult students respectively) across about 12 classes. Numerous teaching staff run classes who are supported by a Youth Coordinator and an Adult Coordinator.

The Management Committee today consists of a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Enrolment Coordinator and one General Member. Roles including, Marketing Coordinator, IT Coordinator, Events Coordinator, and Fundraising Coordinator are likely to be considered in future.

In the 2021 calendar year, the BGLS incurred revenues of just over \$114,000. Operating expenses of just over \$96,000, resulted in a margin (Net Profit) of just over \$18,000. This result lifted total equity to just over \$60,000.

Like any not-for-profit organisation, fundraising is key to being able to invest in strategic initiatives. 'Laternenfest' is the main annual fundraising event for the BGLS and raised \$6,400 in June 2022.

## **Future direction of the BGLS**

The BGLS will continue to fulfil its mission statement. As a community based not-for-profit organisation, we currently face the challenge of relying on a limited number of volunteers (management committee and others) to conduct much of the day-to-day operational functions involved in the running of our contemporary language school. The time pressures associated with this make it unsustainable to continue relying on ongoing volunteer work over the long term.

The BGLS therefore needs to grow to a critical mass of size and scale over the short to medium term (3 years) that enables it to engage the services of paid professionals and/or employ a part time administrator to perform these operational functions while taking a considered approach to future fee increases. This would allow the management committee to focus mainly on the strategic aspects of the school (which should be its role).

Over the long term, the BGLS will aspire to be in a position to be able co-locate with other like-minded organisation/s where it is of mutual benefit, should the opportunity arise. This location should offer greater flexibility and reach from which we can continue to conduct classes and host functions (long term).

The BGLS is only one part of the broader Southeast Queensland region German community. We must seek to better engage and share resources with our fellow local German organisations and leverage off each other.

This document sets out the near (1-2 years), medium (3-5 years) and long term (10-20 years) strategies and our respective measures of success according to 4 domain areas, including:

1. Learning and student experience
2. Our profile
3. Our people
4. Securing our future

# Learning and student experience

*At the BGLS, we offer rich and varied educational experiences that are designed to foster a sense of belonging, while equipping our students with aspects of the German, Swiss and Austrian cultures.*

## **Strategies:**

**Provide an experiential curriculum** that inspires students and extends their capabilities to traverse across culturally diverse (German, Swiss and Austrian) environments. While passive class room based learning will continue to have its place in the educational setting, we seek to enhance an approach of 'learning through doing'. This will increasingly require more activity/emersion based approaches (near to medium term).

**Build a digital experience** that coexists alongside traditional teaching approaches to meet changing student expectations and is at the forefront of pedagogies and self-assessment of progress (medium term).

**Foster a sense of belonging and wellbeing for all learners**, enriched by our vibrant culture, rich internal and external community functions (Fasching, Osterfest, Laternenfest, Christmas performance, etc) and well established and extensive links to the broader Southeast Queensland German community (near term).

## **Measures of success:**

- Recognised as the top organisation in Southeast Queensland for German language classes. No 1 Google ranking for the search 'German classes in Brisbane' or equivalent (near term).
- Explore the feasibility of liaising with third party providers to establish a BGLS 'German camp program' and/or 'Tour of German/Switzerland/Austria' (near to medium term).
- Maintain high student retention rates - ie once enrolled, the majority of students staying with the BGLS for at least 2 semesters. Explore routine mid-week classes for youth students as an alternative to Saturday morning classes which often clash with many other extra-curricular activities (near to medium term).
- Formalise and roll out a confidential student feedback mechanism to enable continued improvement (near to medium term).
- Formalise and roll out a process to check in with former students (eg. 3 months after their last class) and seek to understand their circumstances about no longer being part of the BGLS and what might entice them to come back to the BGLS (near to medium term).
- Develop and foster community identity programs for students, parents/guardians and teachers, such as the provision of coffee/teas at classes, 'Rotwien und Reden' evenings, bake sales, merchandising, etc (near term).
- The facilitation of Goethe Institute (or equivalent) accredited examinations (near term).
- Greater continual engagement from alumni at internal and external community functions (Fasching, Osterfest, Laternenfest, Christmas performance, etc) (near term).

## Our profile

*It is implicit in our mission statement that the BGLS seeks to have a positive local impact within Southeast Queensland. In collaboration with a range of stakeholders we will help advance the cause of other local German communities and organisations to the mutual benefit of all. We will market and promote our unique experiential offerings through a range of avenues and platforms and thereby distinguish ourselves as leaders from other German language providers within Southeast Queensland. This will have positive follow on effects for our main annual fundraising event 'Laternenfest'.*

### **Strategies:**

**Raise our profile and awareness** to potential future BGLS youth and adult students as the No 1 choice to undertake a German/Swiss/Austrian language and cultural experience. This will require targeted online and digital marketing strategies (near to medium term).

**Engage more closely with the broader Southeast Queensland German community** (near to medium term).

**Distinguish ourselves** from other German language providers within Southeast Queensland by providing a unique offering that incorporates experiential activities (near to medium term).

Devise and put in place the **strategy to realise the full potential of Laternenfest** for the BGLS. This includes raising our profile and awareness both internally and externally to the Southeast Queensland German community while promoting our unique course and experiential offerings (near term).

### **Measures of success:**

- Reciprocate website links and promote events for all our stakeholders across our social media platforms (near to medium).
- Make Laternenfest an icon of the Southeast Queensland cultural calendar (near term).
- Develop an organisational structure that is simple, repeatable and concise to define all the roles and responsibilities required to host, de-risk and run successful Laternenfest events (near term).
- Improve recruitment of volunteers (number and quality) who kindly give their time in order to run a successful Laternenfest (near to medium term).
- Raise at least \$10,000 annually from Laternenfest (near term).
- Attract sponsorship/s for Laternenfest and/or the BGLS in general (medium term).

## Our people

*Our success as a not-for-profit community base language school is determined by our ability to attract and retain highly talented, committed people (staff and committee members). For this reason, we are intent on embedding a supportive and inclusive culture built around BGLS's values, where the many talents, passions and perspectives of our staff, committee members and alumni are encouraged and nurtured.*

### **Strategies:**

**Nurture a supportive and inclusive culture** that aligns with the BGLS's values, celebrates diversity and drives excellence (near term).

Develop the leadership capabilities of our staff and committee members in order to **empower decision-making and support innovation** (medium term).

**Attract and retain the best teaching staff** and reimburse them appropriately (near term).

**Invest in our staff and committee members through development opportunities** to support their aspirations and recognise the diverse ways in which they demonstrate excellence (near term).

**Encourage staff and committee members to engage** with the broader Southeast Queensland German/Swiss/Austrian communities as a way to be informed of the latest happenings within these communities (near term).

**Deliver alumni engagement programs that build connection** and partnership to maintain and extend the value of the BGLS experience and strengthen our community (medium term).

### **Measures of success:**

- Routinely run staff and committee member social functions/activities (near term).
- The majority of staff and committee members are willing to recommend the BGLS as a great place to work (near term).
- The majority of staff and committee members agree that the BGLS demonstrates a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion (near term).
- Numerous alumni will actively engage with the BGLS each year (long term).

## Securing our future

*To achieve our mission of 'promoting the language and culture of German-speaking countries within the Brisbane and broader Southeast Queensland region', we need to ensure that the BGLS is securely positioned for the future. This involves sustainably increasing and diversifying the BGLS's revenue base, building an asset base and investing purposefully in the infrastructure, systems, people and partnerships that will enrich the student experience.*

### **Strategies:**

**Increase our revenue base** by sustainably increasing youth and adult enrolments (near term). Working to realise the full potential of our main fundraising event 'Laternenfest', by not only increasing the funds raised for the BGLS but also increasing our profile and awareness within our community, which in turn should lead to increased enrolments (near term).

**Diversify our revenue base** by seeking out and executing on opportunities that may run parallel to and in support our principle activity of providing education in German language and culture to youth and adult students. This may include but is not limited to the provision of Goethe accredited examinations (near term), merchandising of BGLS branded products (near term), an expanded online offering that includes participants from outside Southeast Queensland (near and medium term), the provision of other extra-curricular experiential activities that complement our course offerings (near and medium term).

**Enhance and invest in our digital capabilities** to enhance our vibrant in-person course offerings, meet growing expectations for digital engagement, online delivery, improved efficiency and risk management and improved marketing of our offerings (medium term).

**Streamline our operations** by ensuring the effectiveness of our governance structures, approvals and internal and external reporting processes (near term). Seek to grow student numbers in current course offerings rather than establish new offerings (near term).

**Attract philanthropic investment** to support long term strategic initiatives, with a possible focus on building an endowment fund (medium to long term).

### **Measures of success:**

- Achieve an annual profit margin (NPAT) of at least 15 per cent on our revenue base (near term).
- Routinely invest returns/profits from fundraising and operational cash flows into financial assets that provide sound growth over the long term as a way of establishing and growing an asset base for future strategic initiatives (near term).
- Establish and maintain a marketing strategy for our offerings (independent of Laternenfest) that provides a sound return on investment (near to medium term).
- Reach a critical mass of size and scale that allows the BGLS to hire an administrator (2-3 days per week basis) and/or professional services to undertake some of the operational tasks currently performed by committee members and other volunteers such as invoicing, book keeping, grant writing, general administration, organisation of fundraising activities, etc (medium term).
- Establish a mechanism/strategy to maintain a database of and communication/engagement with past students (alumni) as a way to potentially establish and grow an endowment fund for the purpose of funding strategic initiatives (medium to long term).
- Be in a position to co-locate (should the opportunity arise) with another like-minded organisation where it is of mutual benefit, from which we can continue to conduct classes, run functions and merchandising with greater flexibility and reach (long term).