

- ▶ providing support & information
- ▶ improving skills & capability
- ▶ raising community awareness

A young girl with dark hair is shown in profile, blowing a dandelion seed head. The background is a bright, sunny field of green grass. The image is used as a background for the text on the right side of the page.

our vision

That all people affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder have the best quality of life outcomes possible.

our mission

To provide the best quality range of information, advice and support to families and individuals and advocating for systemic change, the establishment of networks, links and communities and the provision of training and accreditation to the service support system.

our core values

The core values of the organisation are integrity, person-centred, inclusiveness, excellence, accountability and courage.

integrity

person centred

inclusiveness

excellence

accountability

courage

message from the chair



I have great pleasure in presenting the Chair's Report for the 2013-14 financial year.

It has been a year of change for Amaze.

There is continuing policy development in the disability care landscape which will affect outcomes for people on the Autism Spectrum. The first year of the NDIS is indicating that the largest group by primary disability in the four NDIS trial sites is people with 'autism and related disorders', who account for 24% of all plans. This important statistic informs the actions of the Board and the organisation as we work with our community to respond to the challenges and opportunities of the NDIS.

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Within Amaze, we farewellled Murray Dawson-Smith in January after a tenure of some five years and we thank him for his extraordinary dedication and contribution. We are grateful to interim CEO Beryl Raufer for her professional support and guidance until the arrival of Fiona Sharkie in May. Fiona comes to us from a distinguished term as the Executive Director of Quit Victoria. Her diverse background in the private, government and not-for-profit sectors, brings us fresh energy and expertise.

Within the Board, Anne Mustow returned from a year's parental leave in February, and in May we farewellled former Board Chair, Michele Carson, a Board member since 2008. We thank her for her tremendous contribution. My election as Chair, succeeding Michele, brought this series of transitions to a close. Otherwise, the Board remained unchanged with three standing members re-elected at last year's AGM. I would like to thank all Board members for their continued commitment.

Amaze is fortunate to have many dedicated volunteers, without whose support we could not do what we do. I would like to thank them and also to recognise the contributions of our members, families, donors and other supporters: your support, your participation and your voice are vital to the success and work of Amaze.

Finally I would like to thank our Patron, Professor Margot Prior AO: we are very fortunate to have such a distinguished leader in the field of autism research to provide wisdom and guidance in navigating the decisions that lie ahead. I am honoured to serve as the Chair of Amaze and I look forward to continuing to work with you to further our purpose in the coming year.

Jane Evans

1. National Disability Insurance Agency Quarterly Report to COAG Disability Reform Council, page 12.

message from the ceo



Since I took up the role of CEO just 5 weeks before the end of the reporting year, it is only fitting that I pay tribute to my predecessor Murray Dawson-Smith and interim CEO Beryl Raufer and the Amaze Board, staff and volunteers for the achievements made in 2013-14.

As I read through the activities undertaken in the last year to support and inform and resource many thousands of people in our community, I am humbled by the positive feedback I have received from so many individuals and families who benefit from our work.

My aim is to influence change to ensure Victorians living on the Autism Spectrum are able to participate and contribute to society as they desire.

Highlights of the year's work include:

- 'Therapy Connect' online resource to explain types of therapies so parents are better informed to make choices funded by Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs;
- 'Amaze Classroom' online resource to assist teaching staff in how to best support their students on the Autism Spectrum funded by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development;
- Our second sibling camp 'Big Weekend' for 11-18 year olds at Portsea Camp, supported by 5Point Foundation and the Helen O'Grady Drama Academy;

My interest in leading Amaze stemmed from my commitment to a human rights agenda. The UN Charter for the Rights of People with Disabilities echoed much of the work I have done in recent years in women's affairs, international development and tobacco control, for equality for all.

There is growing awareness and incidence of people living on the Autism Spectrum; a new national Collaborative Research Centre for Autism and the incoming National Disability Insurance Scheme - all of which signal a rising momentum in our cause. My aim is to capitalise on this momentum and lead Amaze to continue to support our constituency with information and resources as well as champion our cause and influence change to ensure Victorians living on the autism spectrum are able to participate and contribute to society as they desire.

There is much to be done. I look forward to working with the community and particularly to hear the voices of individuals on the Autism Spectrum as we advance our work into the future.

Fiona Sharkie

Thank you for your help. When my son was first diagnosed one year ago, I was very confused and in need of help. Your organisation was a god send.

PARENT OF 4 YEAR OLD

'helping children with autism' funding

Amaze continued to administer the 'Helping Children with Autism' funding package on behalf of the Federal Department of Social Security (DSS, formerly the Federal Department for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs – FaHCSIA) across Victoria. The Amaze Autism Advisors assisted 2,236 children in the 2013-14 financial year and over 10,000 Victorian children with a diagnosis of ASD before the age of six since this program began in 2008.

2,236 children assisted:
81% in metro Melbourne
19% in regional Victoria

'early days' workshops

Amaze delivered these across Victoria and as in previous years, the team substantially exceeded targets set by DSS.

Quota: 475 participants
Actual: 817 participants
CALD participants 87 (10.6%)

infoteam

Amaze's InfoTeam is partially funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) and partially self-funded through donations and fundraising.

over 10,000 contacts assisted

Support was provided across a wide range of topics with diagnosis and assessment, details about services, school issues and services for adults being major areas.

asd library

The library collection was extended with audio books, a subscription to the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders, and a number of new releases to reflect changes resulting from publication of the DSM5 in May 2013.

approx. 1500 loans

intensive information & family counselling

This service is funded partially by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and partially self-funded through donations and fundraising. During the year, 137 consultations and 17 family information sessions on 7 different topics were provided.

over 400 people assisted

amaze membership

At the end of this year, Amaze had just over 1600 active members, an increase of around 7% on the previous year. The majority of members are parents and carers, with a smaller number of professionals. There has been a small but consistent percentage of members who are individuals with ASD. We have seen slight growth in professional members including the education sector.

1600 members
7% overall increase on LY
86% parents/carers
5% educators
9% practitioners/professionals

'Hear & Share' speaker nights were introduced for members in response to demand. These run each month and are held in various locations across the greater metropolitan area to allow access to as many members as possible. We conducted 11 events during the year with average attendances of 45 people, a maximum of 105 and a minimum of 29.

Membership satisfaction surveys, started in the 2012 calendar year, have shown consistent improvement in almost all metrics surveyed.

The Spectrum magazine continues to be the most highly valued member benefit followed by the Amaze Website, Library and free information sessions.

650 members registered for Hear & Share events

“Fantastic! So informative and gave you the confidence to better assist our families. I would (and will) recommend this to others working with ASD individuals.”
ADULT COURSE PARTICIPANT

amaze certification service

Since its launch in 2009, Amaze Certification Services (ACS) has supported organisations to achieve best-practice outcomes for the individuals they support. Initially this began with ACS's self-developed Autism Spectrum Disorder standards available for early childhood, education, and adult disability services.

With the realisation that the new Department of Human Services Standards (DHSS) and the National Disability Insurance Scheme would alter the landscape of the disability sector, ACS modified its approach and embarked on the process of becoming an accredited certification service through the Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand (JAS-ANZ). This accreditation will allow ACS to certify state and federally funded organisations against:

- The Department of Human Services Standards Victoria
- ISO 9001:2008 Quality Management Systems Standards
- National Standards for Disability Services

Late in the year the first organisations successfully completed the ASD certification process: this is a major achievement for those services, for ACS and for individuals with ASD.

The Victorian Department for Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) has entered into a second contract with ACS to support a further group of schools through the certification process and we continue to receive enquiries on a regular basis.

Mark Tainsh, Director, Inclusion, Access and Participation, Victorian DEECD: "A number of Victorian Government schools undertook ASD Certification through Amaze and received consultation, support and professional development in ASD and inclusive teaching practices.

"This gave them the opportunity to undertake a robust quality assurance process. Schools found this a valuable process to reflect on and strengthen their practices in relation to students with ASD and students with additional needs in general."

asd case consultant practitioner programme

Funded by the Department of Human Services (DHS), Amaze facilitated the ASD CCP programme in North West and Eastern metropolitan Melbourne. Support was provided to disability professionals supporting people with ASD via forums, accredited training, secondary consultation and phone support.

number of disability professionals assisted: over 800 phone/email (both regions)

amaze knowledge

Amaze Knowledge (Registered Training Organisation) conducted 74 professional development sessions during this year with a total of 1,714 participants.

**74 professional development sessions held
1,714 participants**

The RTO continued to be registered through the Australian Skills Quality Authority (ASQA) allowing national delivery of certified training to 107 participants including support staff and carers, teachers, early childhood educators, disability services staff and managers, disability employment services staff and allied professionals.

“ This was my first time and what I expected was just something really boring...it was the total opposite...we also got to make new friends and play games...I can't wait for next year. Thank you to all.”

2013 CAMP PARTICIPANT

big weekend for teens

The second BIG Weekend took place in October 2013 for 75 youngsters who have one or more siblings with ASD. Thanks go to Portsea Camp, 5PointFoundation and Helen O'Grady Drama Academy for their financial and in-kind support, helping us to keep the cost to a minimum for attendees.

22 out of 33 parents/carers said relationships between non ASD and ASD siblings had improved

Of those participants who responded after the camp, 93.1% said they would like to attend again, 6.9% said 'maybe' and 0% said they would not like to go again.

all 33 parents/carers said that their child had benefited from going on the Big Weekend

sensitive santa

Amaze partnered with the GPT Retail group on a successful trial of Sensitive Santa at its Highpoint outlet in 2012, and as a result, we were able to partner again in 2013 at four of their Victorian shopping centres, with sister organisations partnering with them at four in NSW and one in NT.

The InfoTeam and Marketing staff worked together to provide the training and support they needed to ensure their success and the community reception for this initiative has been very positive.

In addition, three local councils, Banyule City Council, City of Whittlesea and Nillumbik Shire, joined together and put on their own Sensitive Santa at Mill Park Library. As well, Bendigo Market Place Shopping Centre (part of Colonial First State) added additional ASD friendly time slots to their normal Santa sessions.

world autism awareness day

The 2014 event marking World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD) was a sensory-friendly visit to Luna Park followed by a short walk around the venue and a dove release with Tom Gleisner as our MC.

There was an excellent turn-out to this event with around 3,000 people taking part and helping improve awareness of ASD in the community.

A number of media outlets covered the event including SBS TV News with a two minute segment on their Sunday evening national news bulletin.

Each year, we see support of WAAD across Victoria by support groups, individuals, businesses and councils.

Sovereign Hill ran its first sensory-friendly day, with a range of supports for the ASD community. We thank Janelle Spierings, Education Officer at Sovereign Hill, for her work in making this happen and we look forward to it becoming a recurrent event.

The Macedon Ranges Autism Network deserves a special mention, running events throughout the month of April and engaging their local community through Lighting It Up Blue, pie eating competitions, guest speakers and a charity golf day.

The Wonderland Party-Playcentre and Cafe held their annual WAAD family fun day and many other events took place across the state, including art exhibitions, colouring-in book launch, family picnics, walks, forums and balloon releases.

sensory-friendly films

Village Cinemas continued to provide sensory-friendly screenings of family movies at a number of Victorian cinemas during the 2013/14 financial year. The screenings have continued to be popular with the ASD community.

attendance:
jul-sep 1400 / oct-dec 1100
jan-mar 1200 / apr-jun 2100



partnerships

Amaze has continued to partner with Ethical Buying, an online supplier of healthy and ethically sourced products, providing a percentage of sales to Amaze; the Variety Children's Christmas Party, enabling around a hundred children with ASD to attend the party; the Forest Hill Lions Club who have supported Amaze through the proceeds of their annual Christmas stocking raffle.

New connections have been made also with the Monash Lions Club and the Victorian Freemasons.

shopping centre quiet room

In response to a comment on the Amaze Facebook page asking for a place to go in shopping centres to reduce anxiety, Amaze partnered with Northland Shopping Centre to create a world-first shopping centre quiet room.

Thanks to the support of the staff at the Centre, in particular Simone Dierckze and Michael Bickers, and many of their suppliers, the Quiet Room was launched in May 2014 to provide a sensory soothing space for individuals of all ages with ASD.

Substantial media coverage of this initiative was achieved with an extensive item on ABC Radio with Richard Stubbs.

growing digital communications

Amaze communicates with stakeholders through a variety of social media including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, website pages, the eSpectrum online newsletter and member emails in addition to hard copy communications such as The Spectrum Magazine.



Facebook: 5,520 to 7,738 fans



Twitter: 700 to 1,000 followers



LinkedIn: 93 to 300 followers



Website: 189,000 visits
19% increase on previous year

thank you to our supporters



Amaze would like to thank everyone who has assisted the organisation over the past year, whether it has been through donations and regular giving, volunteering or supporting events. Your support of Amaze is gratefully accepted and received - without it, our capacity to help those with ASD would be severely restricted.

Thank you very much.

Pictured from the top:

Ellie, Carly and Deanna, three of the wonderful group of volunteers who turned out to help us with this year's World Autism Awareness Day event at Luna Park.

Michael Silvester has been a wonderful supporter for Amaze and for his nephew Hamish. We are grateful to his employers Bank of Melbourne, who have matched all employee donations.

Steve Brydon has set up 'Run4Autism' and as well as running thousands of kilometers himself, has encouraged many others to support those with ASD by taking part.

Talia is one of our youngest supporters who at the age of eight started making and selling hair ties. She raised over \$1,000.

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