



ANNUAL REVIEW 2014 | 2015

Creating inclusive communities that give voice and opportunity to people on the autism spectrum and their families.



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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

It has been an exciting year of growth and development for Amaze and I am delighted to present the Chair's Report for the 2014/15 financial year.

In 2014, Amaze began a major strategic review to determine our future goals, role and purpose. This process was not merely an update of the existing strategy but instead considered the strategic goals of the organisation afresh.

The strategic review was guided by feedback from our community and I was delighted that we received over 600 responses from a diverse range of people including individuals of all ages on the spectrum, parents, carers and many others in the autism sector.

Our community's message was clear. You told Amaze that our main areas of work should focus on raising public awareness of the autism spectrum; working with governments to influence policy; and providing support and information to the autism community and broader society. You told us that more must be done to enable people on the autism spectrum to take their rightful place in the world. We heard you say that society itself needs to change to meet the needs of people on the autism spectrum, to welcome their meaningful participation and value their contributions.

Autism is very much on the national policy agenda. The roll out of the NDIS particularly, offers the potential for people on the autism spectrum to gain more choice and control over their supports and quality of life. There are also promising developments at a State Government level here in Victoria. These policy developments are taking place within a regulatory framework that promotes full participation, equality and access, maximising independent living, social inclusion and economic participation, all of which are fundamental to people on the autism spectrum.

Amaze moved into 2015 with big ideas and bold ambitions, understanding that our focus needed to evolve with the changing social and regulatory environment.

We are listening to the voices, opinions, desires and needs of people on the autism spectrum, and focused on empowering choice and control. We need to be a continuing source of expert, unbiased, evidence-based information to support individuals with the lived experience of the autism spectrum, as well as those working in the sector. Most importantly, we must continue to be an effective voice to influence policy reform and positive social change.

The autism community is diverse, comprised of people with a wide range of talents, gifts, challenges, and needs. Amaze's purpose is to serve all people on the autism spectrum, regardless of their specific diagnosis, challenges and capabilities. We insist that society as a whole recognises the dignity of each person on the autism spectrum. That's how we want the world to change.

There is a lot of work to do and we can't do it alone. As the mother of a child on the spectrum, I know that we achieve far more when we work together and support each other within the community. I thank the many dedicated people in our community who serve and support our organisation.

Amaze is fortunate to be supported by a committed group of volunteers, including our Board, who give their time, skills and expertise to the organisation. At last year's AGM we farewelled two retiring Board members - Anne Mustow and Professor Katrina Williams - and I particularly record my thanks for their generous contribution to Amaze over so many years.

The staff team at Amaze also gives tirelessly of their time and energy to support our community and I thank them for their contribution.

We continue to feel very privileged to have the support of our Patron, Professor Margaret Prior AO, an esteemed leader in the field of autism.

Lastly, I want to thank you, our members, for your ongoing support of Amaze. We are privileged to serve this committed and generous community and we look forward to another challenging and exciting year.

Jane Evans



MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

I am very proud to lead an organisation that enjoys a great reputation among many people and families living with autism. It gives me great pleasure to share with you the achievements of Amaze in 2014/15, in my first full year as CEO.

It has been a pivotal year for the organisation in terms of reflecting on where we've come from and looking ahead. The work undertaken through the strategic review and community survey will guide Amaze over the next 25 years. It's an ambitious and exciting agenda that seeks to create real and lasting change for people with autism, their families and supporters.

While we look to the long-term future and acknowledge the generational nature of change, in order to progressively work towards these goals it is important to establish milestones along the way. An important part of my work over the last 12 months has been guiding the development of the new strategic plan, alongside the Board of Amaze, for implementation from July 2015. Through this process we identified 18 key performance indicators to guide us over the shorter term and enable us to hold ourselves accountable to our community and most importantly, to people on the autism spectrum.

Being new to the autism community, my imperative has been to develop a comprehensive understanding of the community and sector, and to build relationships with various stakeholders. Over the past 12 months I have had the pleasure of meeting and speaking with many people in our community and developing relationships and partnerships to further our collective aims. It has been wonderful to hear great feedback about Amaze from those wanting to work with us.

Amaze must also lift its horizons and work to influence our wider society to support people on the autism spectrum.

We want to see a world where every person on the autism spectrum has the opportunity to participate and contribute, and this can only happen if the wider society builds its knowledge, skills and capacity to support people on the spectrum. This includes government services as well as private organisations, social and recreational facilities.

Amaze was very proud to partner with Museums Victoria on their innovative and ground-breaking 'Autism Friendly Museums Project'. The development of sensory maps and social scripts will increase access to these spaces and lead the way in developing public spaces that are inclusive and welcoming for people on the autism spectrum.

In Victoria our community has continued to benefit from Village Cinemas sensory friendly films and the world-first shopping centre "quiet room" at Northland.

We continue to monitor the experiences of people on the autism spectrum and their families in the NDIS trial site of Barwon, and on a national level. Quarterly reports produced by the NDIA consistently show autism spectrum disorders and related disorders as the number one diagnostic group of all people receiving plans - 22% of all plans issued in the Barwon region and 31% across all seven trial sites nationally (Source: 8th Quarterly Report to COAG Disability Reform Council 30 June 2015). This has enormous significance for our community and our work.

By far, the most significant highlight of the year has been bringing Spectroscopic: Stories of Autism to life. Giving voice to our community and providing the platform for people to share their story with the wider world is what drives me every single day.

I am in awe of the people who shared their truths - informative, funny, bold, sad, challenging and inspiring. Hearing first-hand about life on the autism spectrum, unedited and unscripted, is critical to building greater understanding and inclusion. I want to say a special thanks to our friends at Stokes Street Studio for conceiving and creating Spectroscopic.

Thank you to everyone who has welcomed me to my role as CEO of Amaze over the past year. The years ahead will be busy. There is a lot of work to do. We are excited by the challenge and driven by a passionate ambition to succeed for all people on the autism spectrum.

Fiona Sharkie

Opportunities for Meaningful Participation

As the peak body for people on the autism spectrum and their families in Victoria, Amaze wants to ensure that every person on the autism spectrum is able to participate and contribute to society in a way that is meaningful for them. In 2014/15 we undertook a number of key activities to ensure these opportunities were increased.



STRATEGIC PLAN SURVEY

In 2014, Amaze began a significant strategic review to determine our future directions, purpose and goals. Ensuring the voices of our community were at the forefront of this was critical.

In October 2014, we invited our community to complete a survey to assist in shaping the future of the organisation. Over 600 people responded, including people on the autism spectrum, parents and families of people on the autism spectrum, and professionals working in the field. The responses were spread across the Melbourne metro area and regional Victoria, and represented a diverse age range.

What we heard overwhelmingly from our community is that the key areas of focus for Amaze need to be increasing awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorders, changing the way society sees autism, improving community attitudes and behaviours towards people on the autism spectrum, providing support and skill development to people on the autism spectrum and the transition to the NDIS.

The feedback we received and the insights we gained through the survey responses were vital in informing the development of Amaze's new strategic plan. The priorities that have been set for 2015 and beyond are a direct result of hearing what our community wants and needs.

We are extremely grateful to everyone who took time to share their thoughts and opinions with us to shape the future of Amaze.

"Please don't make any decision about Autistic people without including them in that decision making. Please make your mission changing the way that our culture sees and understands autism."
(Parent of children on the autism spectrum)

"I'm very grateful that AMAZE exists. In the short time I have had the pleasure of dealing with AMAZE it has had a positive effect on my life and the lives of the women in the ASD group to which I belong."
(Person on the autism spectrum)

VICTORIAN AUTISM CONFERENCE 2014

VAC2014, the biennial Victorian Autism Conference, took place at Etihad Stadium in August 2014. As in previous years, the conference provided information and strategies for people on the autism spectrum, their families and professionals working with people on the spectrum. Over

680 delegates attended the two day event. An expo of 24 exhibitors ran alongside the conference.

Keynote speakers Professors Rita Jordan and Andrew Whitehouse, and I CAN Network founder, Chris Varney, gave presentations on topics with practical, positive applications for people on the autism spectrum and their supporters. Other highlights included breakout sessions across the following five streams: Laying the Foundations, Building Skills, Facilitating Independence, Empowering Change and Future Directions. We were pleased to have 8 individuals on the autism spectrum presenting in these sessions; a number we are committed to seeing increase at future conferences.

"Really appreciate the VAC. Found it very informative and helpful the two times I have gone."

"The VAC conferences have been extremely helpful to me, well organized, to cover many age groupings, look forward to the next!"

"Wish the VAC was held annually!"

Prior to the commencement of VAC2014, Amaze hosted a popular masterclass program on a range of subjects including tackling fussy eating, understanding emotions, education and communication skills for people on the spectrum. An additional 332 delegates attended the masterclasses.

The conference ended on a high note with the presentation of the inaugural Amaze Awards for Service to the ASD Community.

Overall delegates reported a high level of satisfaction with the quality of the conference, particularly noting the high quality of international and national speakers, the practical tips and resources for addressing language, sensory processing and challenging behaviours, and the focus on girls/women on the autism spectrum.

As we look toward VAC2016, Amaze will continue to support delegates from regional areas to attend the conference. We also aim to increase the number of people on the autism spectrum who participate in VAC. We will do this through the creation of a high quality program, with presenters who have a lived experience of autism and who are able to offer practical, positive strategies of use and interest to people on the autism spectrum and their families.

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Building Community Capacity

In order to achieve our strategic objectives, Amaze must do more than simply raise awareness and understanding of autism. We must build the capacity and skills of the wider community to help them value and support people on the autism spectrum and their families.



AMAZE KNOWLEDGE

Amaze Knowledge's goal is to improve the quality of support for people with autism and their families, through community education. To this end, Amaze Knowledge delivers structured and personalised education courses for services and organisations directly involved in supporting people with autism and their families. Courses cover topics such as Autism Spectrum Disorder and Strategies, Positive Behaviour Support, Communication, Play, Person Centered Planning, Sensory Processing and training tailored to organisation specific practice.

Throughout 2014/15 we delivered training to disability day services, schools and organisations supporting people with autism. The most popular training course was the Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorders, along with requests for information about behaviour, visual strategies and cognitive theories.

Amaze Knowledge formed a partnership with OSHClub (before and after school care provider) to deliver regular training to their staff nationally. We delivered a number of sessions to Wise Employment for select staff in Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales. We also continued our work with the Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare by providing training for their groups in Autism Spectrum Disorders and Trauma.

We continued to work with GPT Group to train more Sensitive Santas for four local shopping centres. Sensitive Santa provides the first opportunity for some families to have an experience and photo with Santa.

Finally, we worked with Positive Partnerships as the Key Local Facilitator providing support to program attendees following up with the goals they set during workshops.

ASD STANDARDS CERTIFICATION

The ASD Standards take a whole-of-organisation approach through assessing, guiding and observing practice, and creating documented and formal processes to ensure best practice is embedded and sustainable within the school/organisation. Building this structured practice and creating opportunities for regular reflection and review enables the school/organisation to maintain these standards. Most importantly, it ensures that people with autism, their families and carers, can be more confident that the organisation or school will be able to meet the needs of the person with autism.

The Autism Spectrum Standards for Education, developed by Amaze, cover every aspect of best practice for schools teaching students on the autism spectrum. There are 108 standards that cover all school policies and procedures –

from recruitment and induction of teaching staff, through to behaviour support plans and students' individual learning plans. Meeting the standards and achieving certification is a process open to prep to year 12 schools and early childhood settings.

In 2014/15 Amaze worked with twelve schools, two early childhood services and three adult disability services towards certification. Over many months our team provided support and information to these organisations to help map and chart their journey towards achieving best practice.

"Through Amaze's ASD Standards certification, we offer the expertise and support that educators need to improve their practice for students on the autism spectrum."
(Fiona Sharkie, Amaze CEO)

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

When the community become champions in creating a society that values and respects people on the autism spectrum we know we're getting it right. In the last financial year Amaze worked with a number of different groups and associations to build their capacity to provide autism friendly environments.

We have been delighted to see the continued success of the world-first quiet room at Northland Shopping Centre. The Centre was announced as the 'Gold Award Winner' in the 2014 Asia Pacific Shopping Centre Awards 'Cause Related Marketing' category for this initiative.

We have continued to see the growth of sensory friendly films throughout cinemas in Victoria, in both mainstream and independent cinemas, and the introduction of Sensitive Santa programs in local council areas and shopping centres.

One of our most exciting partnerships this year was working with Museums Victoria to create an autism friendly environment for people on the spectrum. Museum Victoria received the Museums Australia (Victoria) Award for Large Museums for the 'Autism Friendly Museum Project'. The project was recognised by the judges as a ground-breaking and innovative project. Amaze was very proud to be a part of such a significant project for our community and we are continuing to work with Scienceworks and the Immigration Museum to develop similar programs.

Raising Awareness and Understanding

Amaze knows that building a world where people on the autism spectrum are able to participate and contribute to society takes more than developing the skills and capacity of people on the spectrum. We need to raise broader community awareness and understanding of the autism spectrum in order to create a society where the contributions of people on the spectrum are respected and valued.

We aim to ensure that the voices of people on the autism spectrum are heard, that they have the opportunity to share their experiences and stories, and that these experiences and stories are shared broadly with the wider community.



SPECTROSPECTIVE: STORIES OF AUTISM

For World Autism Awareness Day 2015, Amaze imagined a project that would enable our community to be seen and heard by the wider community.

Amaze invited those living on the spectrum, and their families and supporters, to share their very individual and unique stories of autism by creating their own short film. Participants were asked to share the good, the challenging and one wish about autism.

The results were everything we hoped for and more; original, informative, courageous, funny and bold, highlighting the diverse and unique qualities of people on the autism spectrum, and the challenges and opportunities that come with this. Participants told us that the campaign changed their perception of themselves, that it now feels more acceptable to be open about what life is really like on the autism spectrum.

Individual films were submitted and a short film was compiled to help convey the incredible diversity of life on the spectrum. Additionally each film submitted was placed on the Spectrospective website in its entirety to provide visitors with a rich resource from which to gain understanding and awareness of the breadth of the autism experience.

Our community told us that participating in the film gave them a sense of empowerment and a feeling of growth. We are indebted to the people who boldly and courageously shared their stories with the world, helping to increase awareness and understanding of the autism spectrum. We are also grateful to the organisations who partnered with us to make the project possible: I CAN Network, Asperger's Victoria, the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC), Autism Spectrum Australia and Autism Tasmania.

Our sincere thanks go to our friends at Stokes Street Studio, for their hard work and dedication in bringing this project to life with great honesty and sensitivity.

Spectrospective 2015 was just the beginning. Each year we will build on this campaign, providing an ongoing opportunity for people on the autism spectrum to tell their stories and share their experiences, in their own voice and their own way.

"Thank you for giving me the opportunity to push myself out of my comfort zone and put this video together. I also sent it to close family and friends to give them a greater understanding of autism."
(Film participant)

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY 2015: TAKING SPECTROSPECTIVE TO THE WORLD

Spectrospective: Stories of Autism created a new place for people on the autism spectrum to share their stories. However, in order to achieve the outcome we sought - raising awareness and understanding of autism in the broader community - taking the film into the public arena was the vital next step.

For World Autism Awareness Day 2015 Amaze created a campaign to bring Spectrospective to the wider community.

Amaze partnered with Village Cinemas and Spectrospective was launched on World Autism Awareness Day at six sold out metro cinema events as well as 4 regional cinemas. A total of 12 screenings of the film were held in public cinemas with more than 1100 members of the Amaze community seeing the film.

Beyond the cinemas screenings, the film was shown at over 40 private and public events including workplaces, disability services, schools, support groups and family events. Spectrospective allowed our regional community to take part in World Autism Awareness Day at their local cinema events, including Bairnsdale, Beechworth and Hamilton. Spectrospective even reached across state borders into Queensland, WA, NSW and Tasmania.

Thanks to the generosity of 5 Point Foundation, a social media advertising campaign was implemented across a variety of platforms including Facebook, YouTube and Google. Overall the film or trailer was viewed more than 50,000 times, an incredible result.

Most importantly it was a great step in raising awareness and understanding of autism, taking steps towards having the voices of those with the lived experience of autism heard and building the capacity of our wider society.

Providing Support and Information

Ensuring that people on the autism spectrum, their families and supporters have access to relevant, timely and useful information and support on autism has been part of Amaze's core promise since our beginnings. In the 2014/15 financial year we continued to provide this through a range of services and programs.

'Helping Children with Autism' Funding

Amaze continued in our role connecting families with the 'Helping Children with Autism' (HCWA) funding package, funded through the Federal Department of Social Security (DSS). The Helping Children with Autism package is an Australian Government initiative providing support for children aged 0 – 6 years with autism, their families and carers. The package covers a range of initiatives and services, including funding for therapies.

In the 2014/15 financial year the Amaze Autism Advisors assisted over 2600 children and their families with 61% of these based in the metropolitan region and 39% in regional Victoria.

2608 children assisted
61% in metropolitan Melbourne
39% in regional Victoria

InfoTeam

Amaze's InfoTeam assist people to access information about autism and to find services and supports. The team provides information to people on the autism spectrum, parents, families, professionals and the general public. This program is partially funded by the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS) and through community support and donations.

In 2014/15 the Amaze InfoTeam responded to over 3,500 inquiries for assistance. Support and information were provided across a range of areas including diagnosis and assessment, services available to assist people, school issues and NDIS.

Over 3,500 people assisted

Early Days

Early Days Workshops are for parents and carers of young children (aged 0 – 6) who have a diagnosis of autism, or who are currently undergoing a diagnosis. Amaze knows that this can be a confusing and stressful time for parents and carers and through the workshops aims to educate

and empower parents in this early part of their journey. Workshops cover a range of topics including Introduction to Autism, Understanding Behaviour, Encouraging Early Interactions, Tips for Everyday Skills, Progression to School, Play and Social Learning and Helping my Child Cope with Change.

In the last financial year Amaze provided workshops to a total of 533 participants, exceeding our set targets for another year. One of the key areas that we are further developing is our program for parents and carers of Indigenous children on the autism spectrum.

533 participants in Early Days Workshops

Amaze Autism Library

Throughout the year the Amaze Autism Library continued providing loans to members across metro and regional Victoria. During this time approximately 1000 loans were made from our collection of books, DVDs, journals and audio books.

One of the challenges for the library service has always been ensuring all our members throughout Victoria have the best possible opportunity to access these resources.

In April 2015, Amaze set out on a path to redistribute the library collection across council libraries throughout Victoria, to increase accessibility to these resources for all of our community. As the first step in this process Amaze identified and formed partnerships with a number of regional and metropolitan libraries across Victoria and began the initial process of decentralising the collection. Participating libraries will receive a selection of the Amaze resources to add to their own collections on autism and these will be accessible to anyone in the community through the inter-library loan system.

This is an exciting step for Amaze in ensuring that our community has easy access to the best information on autism.

Approximately 1000 loans

Memberships

As the peak body for people on the autism spectrum and their families, membership is an important reflection of the community connection to our organisation. Members continue to play a vital role in supporting and guiding our plans for the future.

As at 30th June 2015 Amaze had 1815 members, an increase of over 11% on the previous year. Parents and carers of people on the spectrum continue to make up the majority of our membership group. A key area of focus is

to build the number of people on the autism spectrum who choose to be members of our organisation.

1815 members
11.6% increase in members on previous year
86% parents/carers
5% educators
9% professionals/practitioners

Disability Support Organisations Project

Amaze has been funded by the Department of Social Services to work with Victorian support groups on a project designed to improve knowledge and understanding about the NDIS. The project aims to assist individuals, their families and carers, on the spectrum to develop skills in planning, goal setting, communication and advocacy, and thus enable them to enter into the NDIS with greater capacity to exercise choice and control. This has been a fantastic opportunity for us to partner with like-organisations (The Victorian League for Individuals with a Disability, Carers Victoria, Down Syndrome Victoria, Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council, Association for Children with a Disability) and further our reach into the community. To date, we have worked with a range of groups including regional support groups, culturally diverse groups and metropolitan groups. Participants report increased confidence about the NDIS and we have been particularly pleased by the high number of parents on the spectrum and other community leaders in autism who have contributed to the project.

"I was treated with the utmost respect and was sent a number of resources, very impressed. Delivered what you said you would!"
(Caller to the InfoTeam)

"I am writing to thank you for all the information you provide us parents and families of children with autism. When our son was first diagnosed with Autism, I came home from our appointment with a completely broken heart. I remember calling Amaze that afternoon and cried and cried to the operator who then went out of their way to help me, guide me and show support. That call helped me realise that day that my husband, my little girl and I were not going to be alone and we would have lots of support, so I thank you."
(Caller to an Autism Advisor)

"Having been diagnosed with Autism within the last 12 months AMAZE has been a GREAT means of information."
(Person on the autism spectrum)

Amaze is the Victorian peak body for people on the autism spectrum, their families and supporters.

Since 1967, Amaze has given information and support to people on the autism spectrum, their families, professionals, government and the community.

Today Amaze continues to provide information and also raises awareness and builds understanding of autism.

We help to bring about positive change for people on the autism spectrum.

We work to improve the lives of all people on the autism spectrum and their families.

THANKS TO YOU

Amaze couldn't achieve all that we do without the support of the many individuals and communities who support and assist us throughout the year.

We want to say an enormous thanks to all our partners, members, volunteers and supporters.

Through your generosity, your donations of time, resources and money, we are able to take tangible steps towards building a society that respects every person on the autism spectrum and offers them real opportunities to participate and contribute.

Thank you for your incredible commitment and support.



OUR SOCIAL IMPACT

Amaze aims for a society that

- Respects every person on the autism spectrum, and
- Offers every person on the autism spectrum real opportunities to participate and contribute.

OUR PURPOSE

- We want every person on the autism spectrum to have the opportunity to make choices to participate and contribute to society.
- We want to build a society where these choices and contributions are respected and valued.
- We build awareness and understanding of the autism spectrum.
- We develop community capacity by working with others to help them value and support people on the autism spectrum and their families.

OUR PRINCIPLES

- Person-centred
- Evidence based
- Courage and independence
- Collaborative
- Acknowledge and celebrate difference
- Excellence and professionalism



excellence
evidence
person-
celebrate u

CONNECT WITH US

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