

Annual Review 2015 - 16



i am unique

A word from us

Message from the Chair

Amaze has been engaged in a broad strategic shift over the past 18 months, driven by our commitment to serve the autistic community more effectively.

In July 2015, we launched Amaze's strategic directions to 2040, recognising the generational change we seek to bring about, and establishing short and medium-term indicators of success. Everything we do is focused on our goals to build awareness,

understanding and acceptance of autism, to influence for systemic change through policy and advocacy work, and to up-skill the community to create more opportunities for people on the spectrum to participate and contribute to society.

The Amaze Board plays a key role in driving Amaze's strategy. I am particularly excited about some big changes that we have implemented at the Board level this year.

Parents of children on the autism spectrum have always been well represented on the Amaze Board – currently five of our nine Directors are parents of children, young people or adults on the autism spectrum.

But the voice of adults on the autism spectrum has not been well represented on the Board in the past. This year we committed to change that. We recognised that we cannot effectively serve our community if autistic people are not actively involved in guiding and directing the overarching strategy of Amaze.

This was about diversity and inclusion for us, but it was about something else too: we needed to shift the discussion at Board level to put the voice of autistic people at its centre.

To that end, late last year we went to our community to seek out motivated and passionate individuals on the autism spectrum who were interested in learning more about, and becoming involved with, the governance processes at Amaze.

We were delighted to recruit several individuals on the autism spectrum to take up roles as either Board Director or member of a Board Committee. Rachel McNamara joined us as a Director and member of the Governance Committee, Karen Firth became a member of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee and Paul Goddard joined the Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee. Rachel, Karen and Paul make a significant contribution to the way the Board approaches its work, and the Board is greatly strengthened as a result of their involvement.

We spent a lot of time planning, thinking about how our Board and Committee processes could be improved to support the individual needs of autistic directors, and also considering what supports might be needed outside the boardroom to help our directors perform to the best of their potential. We consulted with our new recruits, with other organisations in the broader disability sector and with autistic people who had experiences of board processes and leadership in other organisations. We have made many changes, large and small, to support the contribution of our new Directors and Committee members, and we continue to learn and strive to improve.

We also created an entirely new position, that of Board Observer. Individuals on the autism spectrum who take up a Board Committee position (rather than being a Director) are now invited to attend our Board meetings as observers, to increase their familiarity with how boards work, and, in particular, to broaden autistic people's direct engagement with the work of the Amaze Board. We see this as an important contribution to building capacity within our community and equipping autistic people with transferable skills that will be valuable to them in their work and life outside Amaze.

By taking these steps, we signal our commitment to driving change, not just at Amaze, but at every level in the community.

Jane Evans

Message from the CEO

A maze has taken great strides in the past year to give voice and opportunity to people on the autism spectrum, their families, carers and supporters. We have embedded this in our strategic directions and it's evident in the outcomes detailed in this Annual Review 2015 -16.

Consultation and engagement are the hallmarks of our efforts to influence for positive change for people on the autism spectrum and their supporters. We ran extensive consultations to inform our submissions to the Victorian Government's Review of the Program for Students with Disability and the Parliamentary Inquiry into autism services, basing our recommendations on the experience, stories, input and ideas of the Victorian autism community. We are proactively engaging with policy makers at both the political and bureaucratic level, partnering with like-minded organisations and working every day to build awareness of the often small changes that can be made to improve inclusion of people on the autism spectrum.

We take seriously our responsibility to represent the voices and views of our community and to provide solutions that are grounded in evidence.

In everything we do, Amaze views the involvement of people with a lived experience of autism as crucial to our work.

From our Victorian Autism Conference preparations, our publications, and our social media presence, to our Spectroscopic films, we have made a sustained effort in 2015-16 to ensure that the voices and ideas of autistic people are at the centre of the discussion.

As we reflect on all that's been achieved at Amaze in 2015-16 we also unveil a new brand identity, featured throughout this Annual Review. Our new brand articulates our role in 'shaping the future for autism'. The future we want to see is one where every person on the autism spectrum is able to self-determine their unique role in the world; where the autistic community is empowered and supported; and where society values and encourages their contribution.

Our brand style also introduces a series of statements to express the diversity and personality of people on the autism spectrum, including: I am unique.

I am focused. I am funny. It's a person-centred and strengths-based approach to corporate branding that aims to re-set and re-position perceptions of people on the autism spectrum and celebrate individuality.

My sincere thanks goes to Caroline Ruddick for her pro bono work advising on our new brand strategy, Stokes Street Studio for developing our new brand and to the individuals on the autism spectrum who gave their time and opinions through the brand development process.

I am deeply grateful to the Amaze staff for the passion and commitment they have shown this year in delivering on our strategic goals. We are immensely fortunate to be guided in our work by our Patron, Professor Margot Prior AO, and supported by a dedicated team of volunteers.

The trust and high regard that Victorian people on the autism spectrum, their families and supporters hold for Amaze is our organisation's greatest asset. I thank you all for your support and look forward to shaping the future for autism with you.

Fiona Sharkie



Building awareness and understanding

Spectrospective – a story worth sharing

Amaze launched the Spectrospective campaign in 2015 as a creative way for our community to share their unique and individual stories of autism through short films. Individual films are submitted and edited into a twenty-minute compilation to help convey the incredible diversity of life on the spectrum.

Each Spectrospective film is released on World Autism Awareness Day (2 April), a day designated by the United Nations to 'highlight the need to help improve the lives of children and adults' on the autism spectrum. Each individual film submitted can be viewed in full on the Spectrospective website, providing a rich resource from which visitors gain an understanding of the breadth of the autism experience.

With funds generously provided by Chain Reactions and the 5point Foundation in 2015 and 2016, Amaze has extended the reach of Spectrospective to more than 114,000 people over the past two years.

The aims of Spectrospective are to:

- empower and inspire children on the autism spectrum and their parents who watch the film
- showcase young people and adults on the autism spectrum and give them a new way to have their say about what autism means for them
- educate the wider community about the lived experience of autism.

In 2016, 32 film submissions were received, and Amaze extended the reach of Spectrospective both within the community and more broadly through community screenings, opportunities to see the film at Village Cinemas and via social media.

Village Cinemas screened Spectrospective at 13 locations in Victoria and Tasmania, complemented by screenings at five regional independent cinemas.

On World Autism Awareness Day 2016, more than 2,500 people attended Spectrospective screenings – with all but one cinema at full capacity.

The levels of interest and engagement in Spectrospective have been significant, and it is clear that Amaze has established a meaningful way for people of all ages to share their own lived experiences of autism in a creative and authentic way.

Looking ahead to World Autism Day in April 2017, Amaze will be extending Spectrospective directly into schools and workplaces. Importantly for schools, we will be seeking not only stories from students but also looking to adapt the project to the education curriculum to enable students to incorporate this into key learning outcomes. We want to increase direct school engagement using Spectrospective as a creative vehicle for attitudinal and behaviour changes within the education setting, to promote inclusion, wellbeing and educational attainment for students on the autism spectrum.

www.spectrospective.com.au

Media engagement

To achieve Amaze's objective of increasing community awareness and understanding of autism in Victoria, we have worked hard to build relationships and increase our engagement with the media.

We have had a number of successes in showcasing the work of Amaze in 2015-16, as well as taking a stronger role in advocacy in response to articles that reported autism in a negative light.



“I loved the messages of what inclusion means and how it’s a human right and the difference within the autism spectrum.”

Viewer feedback on Spectrospective 2016

In September 2015, *The Age* reported on the work Amaze had undertaken with Melbourne Museum to build the museum’s capacity in autism awareness. The article highlighted the development of social scripts and how they assist families and children on the spectrum to plan for a day out at the museum.

After a number of articles were published in a national newspaper reporting autism in a negative light and perpetuating myths, Amaze took the initiative to respond with an opinion editorial highlighting the strengths of people on the autism spectrum and the contribution they make to our communities. While the opinion piece was not published in the mainstream media, publication on Amaze’s social media channels led to an outstanding response and a significant level of engagement.

“Wow! I can be AMAZE’s biggest critic at times, but this letter by the CEO Fiona Sharkie clearly shows our peak professional body and the people they represent are all on the same page. Well done for an outstanding letter.”

Facebook message to Amaze

Amaze’s CEO, Fiona Sharkie, was invited on to ABC 774’s *Known Unknowns* program, hosted by Jon Faine, in April 2016. The program included a detailed discussion about the issues facing people on the autism spectrum and Amaze’s work to increase autistic people’s opportunities, along with what the broader community can do to increase their understanding of autism. A large number of questions from listeners followed, and Fiona ended up staying on air for more than 35 minutes.

Throughout the year Amaze was also quoted and referenced in a number of articles on topics such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme Early Childhood Early Intervention approach, the Program for Students with Disability review release and other autism related stories.

Library outreach program

Amaze formed partnerships with 12 regional and two metropolitan libraries to distribute a selection of 50-60 resources from the Amaze library collection, valued at around \$1,200 each.

This process of decentralisation of the onsite Amaze library aimed to share the collection with a range of public libraries throughout Victoria and put resources closer to the communities who need them.

All resources were distributed in the second half of 2015, and saw the Amaze team visit libraries in Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton, Echuca, Bairnsdale and Traralgon. The final visit on the library tour took place in December 2015, with a visit to the Fitzroy Library in Melbourne.

The libraries have welcomed the additional resources for their collections, together with ongoing advice from Amaze when they are purchasing autism-specific resources. The Amaze community has also responded positively to the change, recognising that the move greatly benefits the whole autism community in Victoria. Users can access the resources from all libraries involved via inter-library loans.

The partnerships established with these libraries will ensure ongoing support for regional communities, and help to raise awareness of the autism spectrum. Amaze and the public libraries will continue to work closely to promote and support one another in creating a community where people on the autism spectrum are included, respected and supported.



Influencing for change

Strategic Plan and Directions launched

On Tuesday 28 July 2015, Jane Evans and Fiona Sharkie presented Amaze's new 'Strategic Directions to 2040' plan at Melbourne Museum. Amaze Patron Margot Prior AO attended, as well as the Opposition Parliamentary Secretary for Autism, Bernie Finn MP, along with approximately 60 other guests.

Consultation with the autism community, including more than 600 survey responses, informed the priorities and goals of the Strategic Plan. The community were very clear that there is a lot for Amaze to do to improve the lives of people on the autism spectrum and that this work will take a generation to achieve; and therefore the Strategic Directions need to be a long-term proposition.

As a result of community feedback, Amaze's strategic priorities are:

1. Increased community awareness and understanding of autism
2. Improved attitudes and behaviours towards people on the autism spectrum
3. More opportunities for people on the spectrum to participate and contribute to society in meaningful ways.

The Strategic Directions were well received by the audience which included Amaze members, staff, volunteers, Foundations (Lord Mayors Community Fund, Houston Trust), government (Department of Education and Training, Victoria Police, Department of Health and Human Services), researchers (OTARC, Autism CRC), autism organisations and service providers (Aspergers Victoria, I CAN, SASI, Learning For Life), schools and other stakeholders.



i am making change

Program for students with disability

One of the most significant initiatives under the Andrews Government's 'Special Needs Plan' was the review of the \$695 million Program for Students with Disability (PSD), the funding mechanism for students with disability, including those on the autism spectrum, in schools.

In 2015, Amaze was appointed to the advisory committee for the review, chaired by former Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Graeme Innes AM. Amaze advocated for a number of key changes to the way the funding is currently being administered, which is not adequately meeting the needs of students on the autism spectrum.

Amaze also developed a formal submission to the Review that was informed by consultation with the Victorian autism community. The submission contained 11 key recommendations to increase the impact of the PSD funding, shifting the eligibility criteria to a functional assessment and ensuring a higher level of accountability.

In March 2016, the Victorian Government released the Review of the Program for Students with Disability, along with their response. Amaze was encouraged by the holistic nature of the review and was very happy to see the adoption of a substantial number of our recommendations. The Government's response shows clear steps in the right direction in addressing the current culture of low expectations for students on the autism spectrum, through some modest additional investments. Importantly, Amaze was also referenced in the Government's response as an implementation partner in the forthcoming reforms.

Unfortunately the Government only accepted 21 out of the 25 recommendations that the review proposed; excluding the recommendations addressing the funding model at the core of the review. Amaze will continue working with the Victorian Government to implement the outcomes of the review, as well as advocating for the acceptance of the final four recommendations.

In March 2016, the Victorian Government released the Review of the Program for Students with Disability, along with their response. Amaze was encouraged by the holistic nature of the review and was very happy to see the adoption of a substantial number of our recommendations.

Driving change - submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into autism services

In May 2015 the Victorian Parliament announced an Inquiry into services for people on the autism spectrum, to be undertaken by the Parliament's Family and Community Development Committee. The Terms of Reference for the Inquiry were very broad and captured all aspects of life for people on the autism spectrum. The Committee called for written submissions to the Inquiry by March 2016, and Amaze successfully lobbied for a five-week extension to the deadline to ensure enough time for in-depth community consultation.

To inform Amaze's submission to the Inquiry, the views of the Victorian autism community were sought to ensure that the direct lived experience from people on the autism spectrum, their families and carers, was central to our submission.

A detailed survey captured more than 500 responses; online discussion forums were facilitated to allow discussion on specific topics by the community; and Amaze participated in a consultation session in Shepparton facilitated by Suzanna Sheed MP, Member for Shepparton District, attended by more than 120 people.

Amaze is proud to have successfully engaged the Victorian autism community in the development of our submission, underlining our commitment to giving voice to the views, opinions and experience of people on the autism spectrum and their supporters.

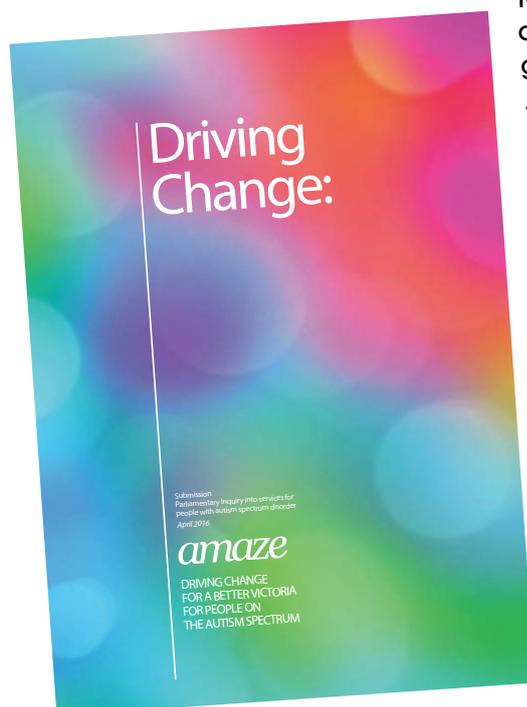
The submission, Driving Change, is Amaze's most detailed and wide-ranging policy submission to date. It included 54 recommendations across the key themes of access to assessment and intervention; education; employment; and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The Committee received 149 submissions from a broad range of groups, a very high response for an inquiry of this type. Once public hearings for the Inquiry are complete in late 2016, the final report is expected in early 2017.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is a social insurance scheme that covers all Australians in the event of disability, and that all Australians contribute to through a recent increase in the Medicare levy. It will support people with disability to live life their way, achieve their goals and participate in community life.

The NDIS provides people with disability and their families with more choice and control over how, when and where their supports and therapies are provided. It also provides certainty that they will receive the support they need over their lifetime - not just up until a certain age.



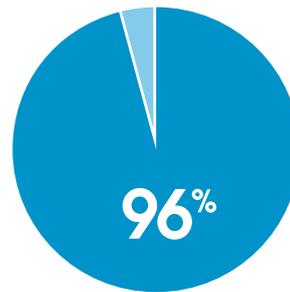
The NDIS has been trialled in the Barwon region of wVictoria since 2013, along with seven other regions around Australia. In the trial sites, autism is the most common primary disability, accounting for 31% of all current NDIS participants.

During this trial period the Victorian and Commonwealth Governments have been working to finalise the agreement for the full roll out of the NDIS in Victoria. In September 2015 an agreement was reached that set north-east Melbourne as the first roll out area from July 2016, with the final areas rolling out in January 2019.

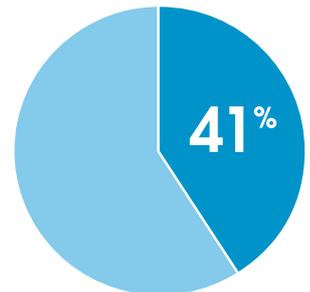
It is estimated the NDIS will provide support to an additional 27,000 Victorians who are not receiving any supports currently, as well as the 78,000 people who receive support at the moment.

Amaze has been working hard to get the Victorian autism community ready for the NDIS by working with support groups as a funded Disability Support Organisation by the National Disability Insurance Agency, and providing accurate and up-to-date information to the community regarding the NDIS.

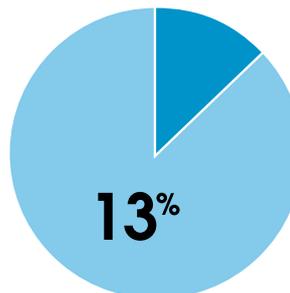
In a 2016 survey, 500+ people from Victoria's autism community told Amaze:



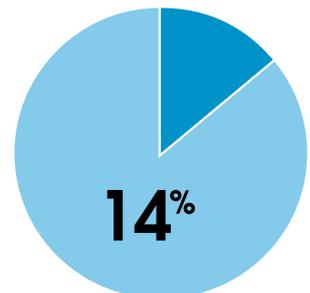
Have heard of the NDIS



Knew when the NDIS was coming to their area



Had received enough information on the NDIS



Were prepared to move to the NDIS

It is estimated the NDIS will provide support to an additional 27,000 Victorians who are not receiving any supports currently, as well as the 78,000 people who receive support at the moment.

Creating opportunities to participate and contribute

Community consultation and policy development

As the peak body for autism, Amaze needs to ensure that we are accurately representing our constituency.

We made a concerted effort in 2015-16 to engage the Victorian autism community, and specifically people on the autism spectrum themselves, in the work that we undertake.

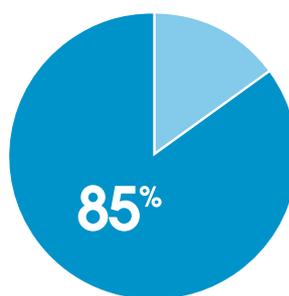
This began with the consultation that led to the development of our new Strategic Directions, which provided the bigger picture that the autism community wanted Amaze to work towards.

To inform Amaze's policy development process, and our submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into services for people on the autism spectrum, we undertook an extensive consultation process, to capture the experiences of the Victorian autism community and hear directly about the issues they are facing and how they would like them to be addressed.

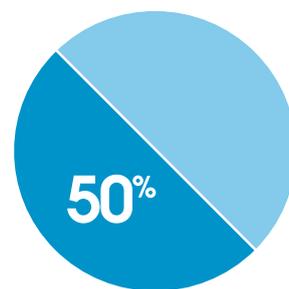
More than 500 responses were received, from people on the autism spectrum; their family members or carers; educators; service providers; employers; and members of community organisations.

We heard from the community the issues they are facing every day and how they would like them to be addressed. This invaluable feedback was incorporated in Amaze's policy development process and will provide the basis of Amaze's advocacy into the future.

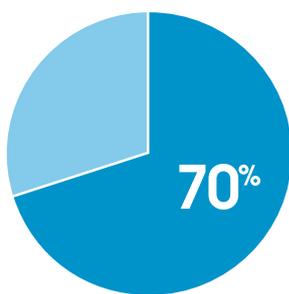
The Victorian autism community reported barriers to education:



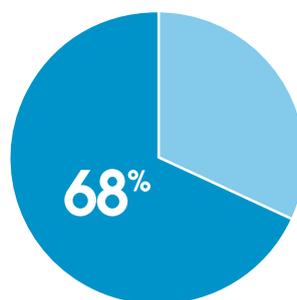
Attended school full time



Received no additional support



Of those who received support, 70% said they were not adequate to meet their needs

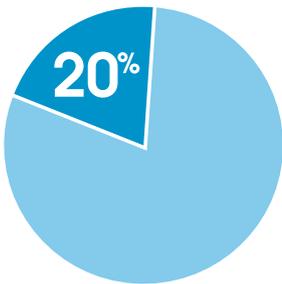


Said they were not supported in school to achieve their potential

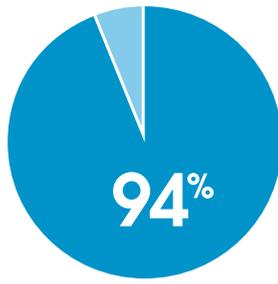
Our top-performing Facebook post for 2015-16 was liked 11,250 times, generated 556 comments and reached an estimated 240,452 people.

We delivered autism news and events to more than 13,000 subscribers via our e-Spectrum email updates.

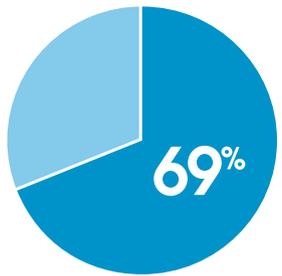
People on the autism spectrum experience poorer outcomes in workforce participation:



Of respondents had been able to find employment



Of which, 94% had not received enough support to help find a job



Said they would like volunteering opportunities to build skills & experience

Creating an inclusive Victorian Autism Conference (VAC2016)

Every two years, Amaze hosts the Victorian Autism Conference, which in 2016 was set for 1 and 2 September. Work started early on this headline event, with Amaze establishing the main guiding principle of inclusion and an aspiration where people with a lived experience of autism would share the stage with researchers and service providers in every conference session.

An important step was to involve the wider community in the planning and development of the conference. An external committee was established to provide advice and to work with Amaze staff, comprising parents of children on the autism spectrum, autistic adults and researchers. This collaborative approach aimed to guide the development of the conference

program; to get input on specific concerns or issues such as sensory needs; to capture great ideas; and to reflect inclusive approaches that have worked at other conferences.

By the end of June 2015, Amaze had appointed Malcolm Mayfield as MC; secured Steve Silberman, Jeanette Purkis and Prof Andrew Whitehouse as keynote speakers; implemented preferential registration for autistic adults; planned for autism captioning, social scripts and sensory maps; and worked to ensure appropriate adjustments would be made to manage sensory impact (including the colour palette being used for website and conference collateral, adjustable lighting, noise management, and providing a dedicated quiet area). Under the conference theme 'All in', Amaze made every effort to establish a truly inclusive conference that would translate into increased attendance by autistic delegates.

Communicating with our community

The way in which we communicate with our supporters and the wider community has continued to evolve over the past twelve months. We are now producing a wide range of news content and articles about autism which we distribute online through Facebook, via our eSpectrum electronic newsletter and our printed member magazine, The Spectrum.

Amaze has 1,675 followers on Twitter and a Facebook community that started the 2015-16 financial year at 10,251 followers and grew to more than 14,600 people by June 2016. We posted content to our Facebook page 608 times during the year, and it has proven to be the social media channel with a consistently high level of engagement.

Our top-performing Facebook post for 2015-16 was liked 11,250 times, generated 556 comments and reached an estimated 240,452 people.

Facebook community 14,600 and growing



Building community capacity

Working in partnership

A maze works closely with organisations and the wider community to build their skills and capacity to include and support people on the autism spectrum.

To this end, a diverse range of training programs tailored to an organisation's needs are delivered by Amaze face-to-face, as consultancy services and via online webinars. In the past financial year our reach has included:

- Community service organisations
- Schools, including TAFE and Universities
- Early Learning Centres
- Disability services
- Family and Youth Services
- Health and Mental Health Organisations
- Individual employers
- Councils.

We continued our work with Museum Victoria and its three museum venues, delivering training at Scienceworks and the Immigration Museum, following successful delivery at Melbourne Museum in the 2014-15 financial year. This training has helped all customer service staff gain an understanding of the needs of the autism community when visiting the museums.



Social scripts and sensory maps were developed by Museum Victoria to assist people on the autism spectrum to plan their trip. Members of Amaze volunteered to trial these resources and provided feedback to Museum Victoria.

Since launching the Melbourne Museum 'Autism Friendly Museum' webpage, more than 8,000 people have accessed it, and 2,000 have visited the Scienceworks page. Amaze would like to thank Museum Victoria for the work and commitment they have invested in creating a welcoming environment for the autistic community.

"It has been really rewarding to know that these kinds of resources can make such a difference and help more people to enjoy their time in parks."

John Kenwright, Access and Inclusion Coordinator,
Parks Victoria



In 2016, Amaze consulted with Parks Victoria to develop a social script for Brimbank Park, located in Melbourne's north-west. Brimbank Park is home to a fully-accessible playground for children with disabilities, and the social script was developed

to assist children to prepare for a visit to the park and understand what to expect when visiting the park. The response from the public so far has been overwhelmingly positive, with several organisations also expressing interest in developing social scripts.

Amaze's Capacity Building team continues to work with a range of organisations, including:

- Chisholm – Home and Community Care Professional Development
- Customised Training
- Practical Outcomes
- Sovereign Hill
- Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
- Raising Children Network
- Australian Nurses and Midwives Federation
- Museum Victoria
- Parks Victoria.

Research collaborations

In November 2015, Amaze signed up as a participant with the Autism Cooperative Research Centre (CRC), the world's first, national research effort focused on autism across the lifespan.

Amaze joined 50 other research, service provider, advocacy and autism peak bodies nationally and internationally, who are working collaboratively to transform the lives of people on the autism spectrum in Australia.

The Autism CRC aims to provide evidence-based, practical outcomes that make a real and enduring difference to people on the autism spectrum, and Amaze will be working with the CRC and its other participants on research that aligns with Amaze's priorities.

Image (Top Left) Melbourne Museum is an Autism Friendly Museum. Photo: Benjamin Healley, courtesy of Museum Victoria.

Image (Bottom Right) Amaze worked with Parks Victoria to develop a social script for Brimbank Park. Photo: Tim Marcus, courtesy of Parks Victoria.



Providing support and information

'Helping Children with Autism' Funding

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

In the 12 months to June 2016, 4,708 families contacted the Autism Advisor Intake line to enquire about HCWA funding and were processed in an average of 11 days, exceeding our targets (the contractual requirement is 15 days). This highlights that the service is operating efficiently while maintaining the level of service the autism community expects of Amaze.

InfoLine

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 Health and Human Services (DHHS) and through community support and donations.

During the 2015-16 year there were:

- 3,054 telephone calls and emails to the information line from families (67%), community members (9%), and professionals (23%)
- 19,000+ downloads of Amaze information and Fact Sheets from the website.

The information service received a 99% satisfaction rating, and 96.4% of families surveyed said they were 'very satisfied' with the Amaze service.

Early Days workshops

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. The Federal Department of Social Services (DSS) funded Amaze to deliver a number of targeted projects in 2015-2016:

- Aboriginal workshops
- culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) workshops
- non-custodial parent workshops
- regional skill development
- webinars.

906 people attended Early Days workshops in Victoria in 2015-2016.

The majority (322) attended 'My Child and Autism' workshops, and the next most popular was the Behaviour Workshop (182 attendees). Amaze trialled webinars and 44 people participated. The workshops have also been highly successful in reaching diverse audiences, securing the following registrations:

- 129 Indigenous registrants (DSS target: 10)
- 118 CALD registrants (DSS target: 30)
- 227 non-metropolitan registrants (DSS target: 95).

Disability Support Organisations Project

The Disability Support Organisations (DSO) project is designed to improve knowledge and understanding of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). Amaze receives funding from the Federal Department of Social Services to work with Victorian support groups, and has delivered 46 workshops to help people enter the NDIS with greater capacity to exercise choice and control.

“The carer session helped to give me a kick-start to start preparations for entering Uni, and to have my first haircut in 2 years. Thank you for reminding me that self-care is important to my family success.”

Wellbeing workshop participant

In August 2015, Amaze facilitated a two-day workshop with leaders from regional and metropolitan support groups, including three participants who were on the autism spectrum. Leaders indicated that the workshop was highly relevant to their groups, they reported feeling better informed and confident about the NDIS and felt they could apply the learnings to their group.

In October a workshop was held in collaboration with the Ballarat Autism Network, a combined group of carers and professionals who work with people on the autism spectrum. Leaders from the Stawell/Ararat Support Group and the Embrace-Ballan Support Group also attended, including some participants who are involved in other support groups such as Lego clubs, and social groups.

The workshops covered the following topics:

- Understanding the NDIS
- Planning for a ‘good life’
- Establishing links in your community
- Self-advocacy
- Negotiation skills
- Understanding choice and control
- Understanding your rights
- Explaining autism to others
- Engaging others in positive behaviour support strategies to enable people on the autism spectrum to experience choice and control in their interactions with the community.

The workshops included a session by the Human Rights Commission who explained the principles of advocacy, as well as rights and responsibilities under the Disability Act, the Charter of Human Rights, and the NDIS.

In 2016, the workshops have focused on the north-east Melbourne region due to the roll out of the NDIS for this area from 1 July 2016. We strengthened the relationship between Amaze and the Northern School for Autism to establish a support group, given its position as the autism school with the most families in the north-east roll out area.

Amaze brought in an NDIS participant from the Barwon region to share her experiences and the groups appreciated hearing about the strategies used to navigate the NDIS.

In response to some concerns Amaze had about the wellbeing of parents of children on the autism spectrum, Amaze partnered with another Disability Support Organisation, Carers Victoria, to provide wellbeing workshops for our support groups. This informed parents about supports for themselves and also emphasised the need to maintain their own health and wellbeing.

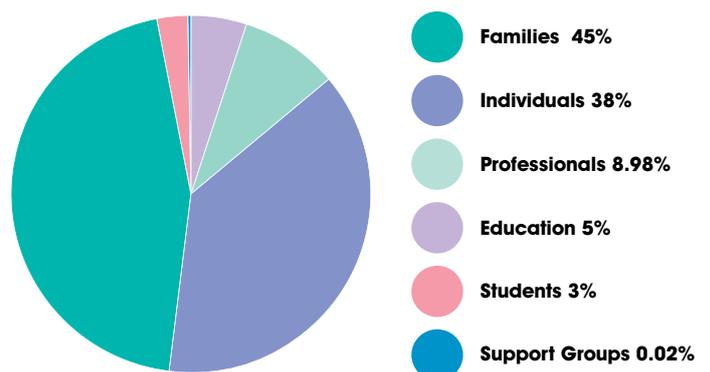
Membership

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.

Over the past twelve months, our members have been invited to participate in research projects, to provide input into our submission to the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into autism services, and our planning for the 2016 Victorian Autism Conference in Melbourne.

As we work towards our stated strategic directions to 2040, Amaze members will continue to be an important part of our future as we build the profile of Amaze and achieve our strategic goals.

Amaze member profile



Thanks to you

Amaze is grateful to all of our partners, members, volunteers and supporters.

Thanks to 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.

Our fundraisers

Community fundraising contributes vital funding for the work of Amaze, and we have been fortunate to receive financial support from a wide range of highly motivated individuals and organisations over the past twelve months.

Our supporters have raised funds in many and varied forms, including fun runs, marathons, fitness classes, dinners, a walk around Australia as well as hosting Spectroscopic events for World Autism Awareness Day on 2 April 2016.

We sincerely thank each and every person who raised funds for Amaze or made a donation to support our work in the community.

Connect with us

Amaze Inc.
24 Drummond Street, Carlton
PO Box 374, Carlton South VIC 3053
Phone: 03 9657 1600
Email: info@amaze.org.au
Facebook: www.facebook.com/autismvictoria
Twitter: @autismvictoria

