



autism
tasmania

ABN: 90 215 494 454

30th Annual Report

2021 - 2022

How we made a difference

Statewide Contacts
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(03) 6722 5000
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Our Appreciation

Autism Tasmania acknowledges the grant funding provided by our funders:

Funders

National Disability Insurance Scheme
Department of Social Services

Donors

Specsavers Optometrists Glenorchy
The Robert Fergusson Family
Foundation Tasmanian Police
Catholic Development Fund
HFC Community Foundation
Payroll donations
Private donors

We thank all individuals who supported us during the year and gratefully acknowledge the generous donations made by our members & the community.

Our Program Partners



Tasmania's gender, sexuality and intersex status support and education service



promoting development of young children on the autism spectrum



Contents

About Us.....	1
Our Statewide Locations.....	1
Our Vision & Mission.....	2
Our Core Values.....	2
About Autism.....	3
About the Tasmanian Autistic Community.....	4
Key Outcomes in 2021-2022.....	5
Our Board.....	7
Chairperson's Report.....	8
Our Team.....	9
Chief Executive Officer's Report.....	10

OUR SERVICE PERFORMANCE

Autism Advice.....	11
NDIS Support Coordination.....	13
Learning & Development.....	15
Peer & Social Networks.....	17
Representing Members.....	19
Member Library.....	21
Terminology Policy.....	23

ATTACHMENT #1

Audited Financial Statement 2021-2022

About Us

Our Office Locations

Hobart office

Level 2, 168 Collins Street
Hobart, TAS 7000 (opened
August 2022)

21 Goulburn Street
Hobart, TAS 7000 (Until
August 2022)

Launceston office

39 Tamar Street
Launceston, TAS 7250
(opened 1 April 2021)

Burnie office

9 King Street
Burnie, TAS 7320
(opened 1 July 2021)



Autism Tasmania acknowledges the Aboriginal people as the traditional owners of the lutruwita (Tasmania) Aboriginal land, sea & waterways. We pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging.



Our Vision & Mission

Our vision is **optimal outcomes** for all Autistic Tasmanians.

Our mission is to work with, and for, the Tasmanian Autism community to:

- **Create** the right conditions for Autistic Tasmanians to achieve.
- **Grow** community knowledge about Autism and how to make a difference.

Autism Tasmania is the peak independent voice for the Tasmanian Autism community.

We work closely with our members and the extended Autism community. We provide Autism advice, service connection, support coordination, peer networks, parent workshops, learning & development and free membership to Autistic Tasmanians and their immediate family to access additional benefits, such as our members library and e-news.

We also work with service providers and businesses to provide learning and development in organisations to grow knowledge and confidence. We promote awareness for Autism and the simple adjustments that make a difference. Our systematic advocacy ensures that the voice of the Autistic community is heard and improvements are made.

We have three offices across the state of Tasmania; in Hobart, Burnie, and Launceston. We support the Autistic community as a community-based, not-for-profit, incorporated association and registered charity.

Core Values

Inherent worth

We recognise and celebrate that people on the Autism spectrum are valuable members of society, capable of contributing to and enriching the lives of those around them.

Social justice

We value equality and recognise that some people need a greater share of resources in order to have equal opportunity.

Individual dignity

We value individuality, acknowledge that everyone should be treated with respect, and we believe that all people should have the opportunity to be involved in choices relating to their own wellbeing.

Respecting language and identity

We acknowledge the differing views within the Autism community for describing Autism and respect the right of individuals to choose the language which they believe most powerfully represents them.

Evidence-based practice and policy

We value evidence based practice and consult with and seek the input from the Autism community to influence better policy outcomes.

Collaboration and community

We value partnerships with other organisations, and celebrate the diversity and achievements of the community we represent.

Professionalism and accountability

We strive to operate our organisation transparently and with the best interests of our members and the Tasmanian Autism community in mind.



About Autism

Autism occurs when the brain develops differently. It affects the way people experience and interact with the world.

Given the extraordinary complexity of the brain it is easy to appreciate the range of both positive and negative impacts of Autism. Autism is one of a number of conditions that contributes to neurodiversity.

Autism affects the way people sense, communicate, behave, and interact with the world. It is talked about as a spectrum disorder. People experience their Autism to different degrees, meaning that everyone on the Autism spectrum is unique!

There are however some common autistic traits. Signs of these traits that others may see include:

- different communication behaviours such as not making eye contact, unusual speech patterns, or being non-verbal
- not responding to the behaviour, emotions and non-literal language of others in an expected way
- strong preference for structure and routine
- intense focus on areas of interest
- repetitive noises or movements (known as stimming)
- sensory hypersensitivities to certain sounds, smells, touch, taste, movement, or visual stimuli

3

All, some, or none of these traits may be obvious to others or only noticeable in difficult settings. Some people on the Autism spectrum make a lot of effort to hide their autistic traits.

Just like every person, each Autistic person has their own unique strengths, interests, potential, and needs.

Although Autism is complicated, the good news is that understanding and access to expert supports improves outcomes.

Our logo symbolises the rare native Tasmanian orchid (Thelymitra or sun orchid). This fascinating plant is a significant part of the flora of Tasmania. Its flowers are blue, pink, or yellow. This logo inspires our mission. Just like the Autism community, this extraordinary plant blooms "only when the conditions are right!"



About the Tasmanian Autistic Community

The Select Senate concluded their review and stated

"Life outcomes for autistic Australians are unacceptably poor.

This comes at an enormous personal and economic cost."

- Commonwealth of Australia, March 2022

Prevalence

Autism prevalence (number of diagnosed individuals in a total population) and incidence (number of new diagnoses per year) is not accurately known. Nationally consistent diagnosis criteria and data collection processes are emerging, however at present remain focused on childhood diagnosis and on disability. Not all people impacted by Autism identify as having a disability. Autism is a lifelong condition. Autism Tasmania adopts the prevalence estimated by Autism Spectrum Australia at 1 in 70 persons, or 7,500 Tasmanians, however believes this is vastly underestimated due to the rise. In Tasmania, Autism is the second most prevalent disability following intellectual impairment.

NDIS

As at 30 June 2022 35%, or 4,226 of the 12,104 Tasmanian NDIS participants, have Autism as a primary or secondary disability for eligibility to this program.

Education

Tasmania's Department of Education recognises 7,064 students with disabilities in Tasmanian Government Schools. DoE data shows there are 339 students with autism in kindergarten to grade two; 420 in grades three to six; 294 in years 7 to 10 and 61 students across years 11 and 12. Although this data is not definitive, as not all autistic students are identified as requiring adjustments, it does support the view that the prevalence of autism in Tasmania is higher than that estimated through ABS data.

Employment

In Australia, the unemployment rate for people with autism spectrum disorders was 31.6%, more than three times the rate for people with disability (10.0%) and almost six times the rate of people without disability (5.3%).

Diagnosis

There remain challenges to obtaining a consistent, timely and best-practice diagnosis. Tasmanians have limited access to both public and private options for diagnosis. In 2021-22, the public waiting lists have exceeded 18 months. Autism Tasmania estimates that 300 children are still currently awaiting diagnostic services. Medicare Items rebates for adults up to age 25 will commence in 2023.

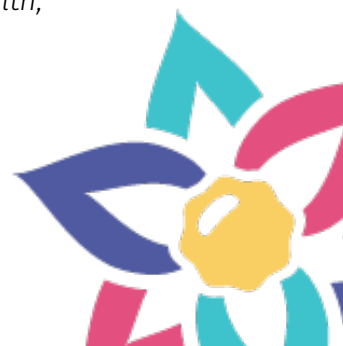
Mental health

70% of people with Autism experience mental health challenges including anxiety and depression.

Barriers to Optimal Outcomes for Autistic Tasmanians

Autism Tasmania is working to reduce the following barriers.

1. Gaps in community and mainstream health, education and other professional knowledge and understanding about needs and strengths in the Autistic community.
2. Gaps in employer knowledge and understanding about the strengths in the Autistic Community.
3. Gaps in supports and services due to:
 - Long diagnosis wait list
 - Low or no access to allied health practitioners and skilled support workers
 - Incomplete knowledge of Autism across mainstream services (health, mental health, education, and justice)



In 2021/22 we grew Autism Tasmania...

5



Strategy

Transformation continues with defining and building our four programs to measure impact and cost efficiency; we restructured our operations and our governance.

Acquired new Hobart office - strengthening client access and L&D delivery capability.



Partners

Partnered with many organisations to develop the capacity of autistic individuals and our own organisation.

Staff

6.9FTE staffing at period end 10% decrease.

12 team members at period end. 14% decrease.



Finance

\$10,464 received in donation. 11% increase. Balanced budget despite Covid impacts on revenue \$46 operating surplus achieved.



Systems

New fully online finance and payroll systems, to deliver significant efficiencies and a new CRM for NDIS support coordination.

We now match industry leaders in performance management and efficiency.



Communication

12 editions of Spectrum 3-news delivered.

4835 followers on Facebook. **12%** increase.

187 posts, **15%** increase.

451 members in our private members Facebook group. **30%** increase.

145244 new visitors to website visits. **41%** increase.



Governance

2,624 members, **13%** annual increase.

11 Board and Subcommittee meetings, **125%** increase.

1 Constitutional change.



Advocacy

6 national NDIS consultation submissions.

1 state consultation submissions.



...to strengthen the impact of our programs



Autism Advisory Services

3,034 requests for advice or information.

76% of these were clients (Autistic people, their family & carers).



Learning & Development

60 L&D workshops this year is a 93% increase from last year.

519 participants which is a 36% increase.



6

NDIS Support Coordination

81 participants received **2054** hours of support coordination.

A 52% increase.



Peer & Social Networks

2 active peer support groups.

50 registered participants across these groups.



Our Board

CHAIRPERSON

Skie Mitchell (from 2022)

Kieran McDonald (until 2021)

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON

Philip StEvens

SECRETARY

Christine Wright

TREASURER

David Donald

BOARD MEMBERS

James Baker

Dr Lisa-ann Gershwin

Laura Godfrey

Pip Barnard

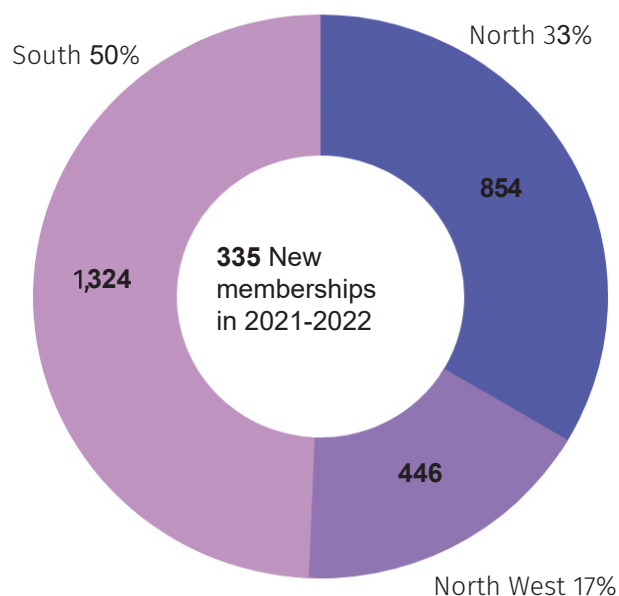
Lifetime Honorary Members

Kieron Cornwell

Total Members

2624

Members by location



At the AGM held on 21 October 2021, members:

1. Voted to approve the Special Resolution to adopt a revised Constitution. These changes strengthened the inclusion of autistic person across our membership and governance structures, in accordance with Constitution clause 42.1
2. Elected 4 Board members (***) for a 2 year term in accordance with Constitution clause 34.7

Board Member Attendance 2021-2022

Name	Required	Attended
James BAKER (appointed Oct 2021)	8	3
Pip BARNARD (elected Oct 2021)	4	4
David DONALD (elected Oct 2020)	8	7
Dr Lisa-ann GERSHWIN (elected Oct 2021)	8	8
Laura GODFREY (elected Oct 2021)	8	8
Kieran McDONALD (elected Oct 2021)	8	8
Skie MITCHELL (elected Oct 2020)	8	7
Philip StEVENS (appointed Oct 2021)	8	8
Christine WRITE (elected Oct 2020)	8	7

Chairperson's Report

It is my privilege to present the 30th Autism Tasmania Annual Report.

Following our 29th AGM in October 2021, I eagerly embarked on my volunteer service to the Tasmanian autistic community as Chairperson, Autism Tasmania. Thank you Kieran McDonald and Board for the smooth transition and support.

At this AGM, in addition to our first Board election; we adopted a new constitution that re-structured our governance and membership categories. We embarked on an ambitious plan to strengthen how we work with and for the autistic community and how we keep the autistic community in control of their organisation. We are ready to establish our first autistic community advisory subcommittee reporting to the Board on strategic and operational matters.

I write this report to deliver to our members at our 30th AGM. Our 30th anniversary celebration is a major milestone for our organisation and our members will see evidence of the significant achievements as documented throughout this report. It is therefore with pleasure that I report on a year where we have performed well for the community we serve despite the complexity of unanticipated challenges. We worked to develop and deliver sustainable programs to build capacity of our community, in parallel to build our organisation's processes and systems.

As a parent of autistic children and active member of the school and business community I experience the unjust consequences of a mainstream and community services that should by now be more knowledgeable and appreciative of autistic people and their diverse strengths and needs.

As a parent of autistic children and active member of the school and business community I experience the unjust consequences of a mainstream and community services that should by now be more knowledgeable and appreciative of autistic people and their diverse strengths and needs. For this reason I am delighted that this year Autism Tasmania has planned for the first step of delivering significant community communication campaigns with a focus on learning more. We are excited to learn of everyone's feedback and importantly participation in our expanded learning programs.

Throughout this reporting year, Autism Tasmania in a parallel to building our programs and systems; has actively represented our community at the national consultation led by the Select Senate Committee on Autism. Our community will not be surprised that the committee stated in their final report that "Life Outcomes for autistic Australians are unacceptably poor. This comes at an enormous personal, social and economic cost." This statement is news to everyone - except the autistic community! It heralds a further significant opportunity for the work of Autism Tasmania as we have achieved recognition that Autism is more than disability and hence investments outside of the NDIS are needed.

Join us all in celebrating 30 years of achievement for the Tasmanian autistic community.

Skie Mitchell
CHAIRPERSON



Our Team in 2021-2022

This year, we implemented new internal structures to align with our focus on delivering 4 programs.

The following employed (E) and volunteer (V) team members have worked for Autism Tasmania this year, as we transform our organisation.

Team members working across more than one program indicated as (*).

Position titles included as relevant to the end of the reporting period.

PROGRAM, BUSINESS & OPERATIONS TEAM

Donna BLANCHARD (E) - CEO

Allison LAPHAM (E) - Business Manager

Robyn DAVIS (E*)

Izaak de WINTER (E) - Accountant

Lisa BERRY (E*)

Nyisha BILL-ETESON (E)

PEER & SOCIAL PROGRAM TEAM

Daniel ZOMERDYK (E,V)

Robyn DAVIS (E*) - Coordinator

Lisa BERRY (E*,V)

Jason SANDERSON (V*)

Kate COCHRAN (V)

Donna KENNY (E,V)

Pen BRAKE (E,V)

Geraldine ROBERTSON (E,V)

Solomon SMITH (V)

Tracey VOSS (E)

AUTISM ADVISORY TEAM

Courtney LANDERS (E)

Roger O'MEAGHER (E*)

Amanda GUNDERS (E*)

Krystyna MOYLE (E*)

Jason SANDERSON (E*)

Mellissa RADFORD (E*)

Grant MALONEY (E)

Lisa FOOTE (E)

Dianna KING (E)

NDIS SUPPORT COORDINATION PROGRAM TEAM

Kerryn PAMMENTER (E) - Program Manager

Jamie MITCHELL (E)

Krystyna MOYLE (E*)

Mellissa RADFORD (E*)

LEARNING & DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Amanda GUNDERS (E*) - Coordinator AC

Roger O'MEAGHER (E*)

Jason SANDERSON (E*)

Rachel NEEDHAM (E)

Robyn THOMAS (E)

Lisa FOOTE (E)

Jodie DENMAN (E) - Coordinator PD

We have farewelled Maree Morgan and Robyn Thomas and thank them for their 10 years of service.



Chief Executive Officer Report

It is an honour to lead the Autism Tasmania team and work to build on its 30 year history of making a difference to the Tasmanian Autistic community.

The three words that best report on my first full 12 months as CEO are ... learning, learning and learning!

The "middle years" of any transformation project are the hardest. It is the time when early results and new challenges become clearer. It is a time for learning and continual adjusting. That was our year!

As our funding is now nationally sourced we had to quickly learn how to collaborate nationally and represent the voice of Tasmanians. Through our efforts we now have strong networks with national government departments, autism organisations and partners. These collaborations and lessons will serve us well in the future as we negotiate funding arrangements beyond 2023.

This year the needs of our community for individual support at times exceeded our funded capacity to supply. The gaps in mainstream systems (education, employment, health and housing) to appropriately accommodate autistic people are not reducing as promised. The pandemic expanded these gaps, because our community is impacted in more ways than other groups. This year we have learned how to gather compelling evidence that links what our individual community members to inform our business case to fund us for systemic advocacy. This evidence is critical for our work on the anticipated National Autism Strategy.

Special recognition must go to the Autism Tasmania staff who bring their talents and commitment and each day learn from our community and each other new ways navigate complexity. How to delivery services safely in the context of the pandemic. This year we have regrettably learnt how to say thankyou and farewell to long service departing staff. I wish to extend a personal thank you to everyone for patiently helping me learn and grow my understanding of autism, diversity and culture. While humbling it has strengthened my commitment to address the unacceptable knowledge gaps across our community. For this reason, Autism Tasmania as focused this year on developing our Learning & Development program to ensure everyone - autistic people and the broader community has the opportunity to learn.

A note of appreciation to Chairperson and Board who have led Autism Tasmania so ably this year. Together with our Peer Support Facilitators these people volunteer their time to further Autism Tasmania's aspirations. We close this year celebrating Autism Tasmania's 30 year of achievements. We believe we are well positioned to realise everyone's aspirations for better life outcomes through the greater community appreciation, services and supports that connect seamlessly across a persons life.

Donna Blanchard

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

10



How we made a difference

Context

A mother contacted us for information as her teenage daughter had just been diagnosed with autism and given an NDIS Plan following a hospital admission for anxiety and depression. We provided her with information about autism in women, psychologists with autism experience, and support workers.

Outcomes

Both mother and daughter attended an AT office and let advisors know that the psychologist had made a real difference in their life and was "exceptionally helpful". They then requested further assistance to link with additional supports and progress further. Daughter is now engaged in PSAW as well.



Context

Client is a carer and parent of an autistic boy in primary school who had only received a diagnosis 12 months prior. Client advised he had advised the school of diagnosis and requested a review of the learning plan, as previously the school had thought the child had behavioral issues. The client advised that his child was becoming more dis-engaged from school and the school was reluctant to make further adjustments. Client did not know what else he could do to help his child receive an education.

Outcomes

Advised client of their rights and the schools obligations under the Disability Standards for Education 2005 and discussed the reasonable adjustments that could be made at school to assist his child. Provided email with written advise of this and links to further autistic created resources on reasonable adjustments in the classroom. Provided links to Positive Partnerships and a list of advocacy services in Tasmania to assist bridge the gap between client and school. Client called back months later and stated that his child is now attending school regularly and has adjustments in place. He was very grateful for the Autism Advisor Service for helping get things back on track

11



Autism Advice



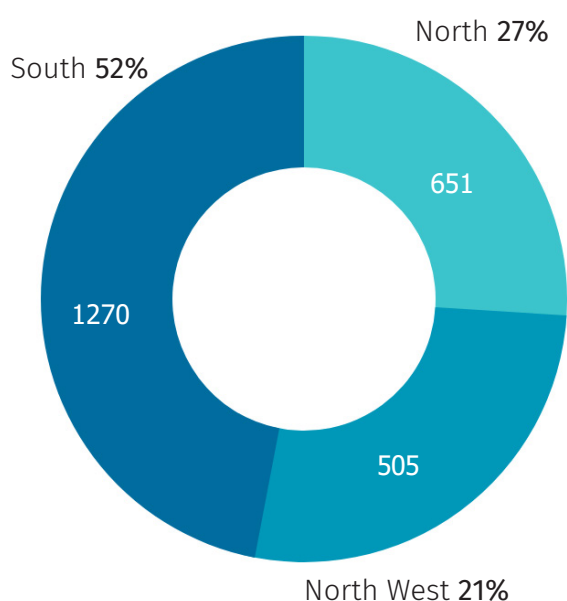
Autism Tasmania's Autism Advisory team guide people through:

- connection with local services, therapists, support and our mainstream and community networks.
- the process and experiences of Autism assessments.
- the NDIS application and processes.
- access to national resources through our partner Amaze's **Autism Connect**.

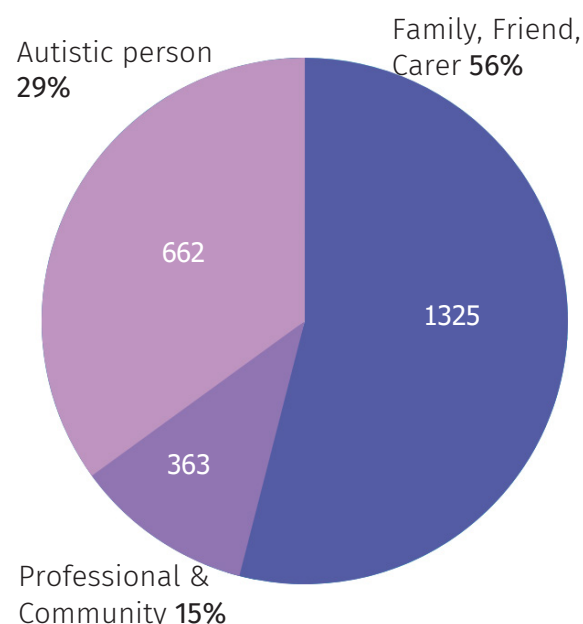
In 2021/22 Autism Tasmania developed IT systems and workflow processes that have increased productivity and allowed for greater transparency and accuracy in data collection

Autism Tasmania's advisors conducted a total of **3034** contacts in 2021/22, **76%** of contacts were people on the Autism spectrum, their family and carers.

Client Location
2021-2022

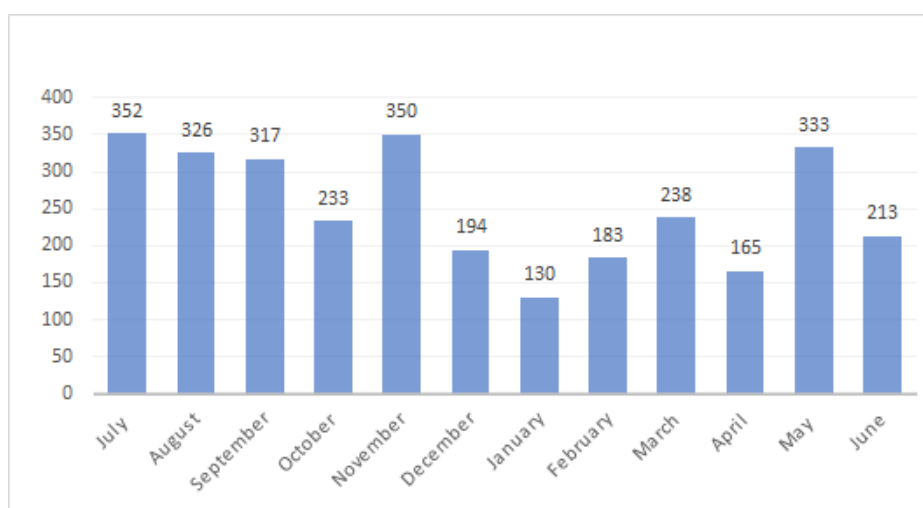


Client Contacts by Category
2021-2022



12

Client Contacts



“This is VERY comprehensive advice! Thanks so much for all the info, enormously helpful.”



How we made a difference

Context

We were contacted by a carer and parent of a disabled child about a lack of School Leaver Employment Support (SLES) offices that were able to accommodate the diverse needs of participants on the Autism spectrum in their local area.

Outcomes

After our team met with Disability Employment Services (DES) the national and local managers of the DES were able to identify ways they could make their service more flexible and accommodating for the Autistic and neurodiverse community. They offered this client placement without NDIS funding to complete a trial phase and ensure they were setting up the program in a way that truly supports Autistic participants.

.....

Context

Young adult participant who has previously had limited engagement with NDIS supports and their NDIS plan (by choice). Now 18 and seeking a greater level of independence and to take control of their own life.

Outcomes

With support, participant has considered options for future employment, and recognised that capacity building is required to make decisions about employment related goals. Participant self-identified volunteering as a good first step to gain some different experiences to inform future decisions about career pathways. Participant is now working well with a mentor to explore and access volunteering opportunities – and has learned to use the invoice approval and payment systems to manage payment of their mentor!

.....

Context

Teenage participant required extensive support to secure a stable and appropriate out of home living arrangements. Disengaged from education, lack of informal and local community supports.

Outcomes

After extensive coordination with NDIS, state government and mainstream systems, a secure home and skilled support team has now been established. This has enabled informal supports to keep effectively supporting the participant, and enabled the participant to flourish and to start realising their potential. Appropriate, capacity building supports are in place – and participant is now re-engaged in education!

13



NDIS Support Coordination



Autism Tasmania specialises in NDIS Support Coordination for the Autistic community.

We provide support coordination for Autistic participants who have this funded in their NDIS plan. We provide support coordination exclusively to participants on the Autism spectrum and use our knowledge and understanding of Autism to enable participants to find the right supports to achieve their goals.

Support coordination is an NDIS funded support that helps participants to make the best use of the supports funded in their plans. It is a capacity building support that helps participants to:

- Understand and use their NDIS plans to pursue their goals;
- Connect effectively with NDIS providers, community and mainstream supports and other government services;
- Build skills and confidence to coordinate their own supports.

We use our autism and NDIS experience and expertise to provide support coordination only for autistic participants who have support coordination funded in their plans.

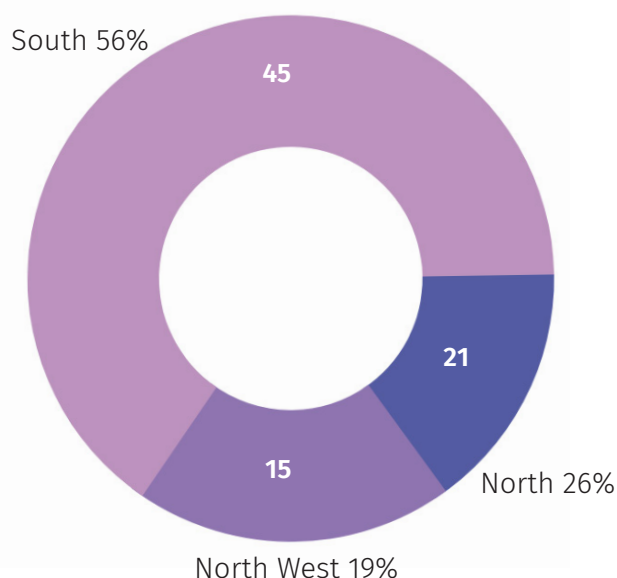
We have maintained a team of three support-coordinators across the year, with the loss of one support coordinator in the North at the start of the year and the successful recruitment of a new team member in the South.

We supported 81 participants across the state (62% increase).

We are excited to continue growing our service and to provide supports for a growing number of autistic participants.

14

Support Coordination
Clients by Location



2,054 billable hours,
52% annual increase

“Autism Tasmania provided me with masses of help in understanding the way NDIS works, and their knowledge of the rules and guidelines to assist with my constant queries was enormous. It was never any trouble for Autism Tasmania to answer my many calls and emails and clarify any concerns that arose.”



How we made a difference

Autistic Community Learning & Development



[View our Parent & Carer Workshop Calendar here](#)

[View our National Assistance Card Workshop Calendar here](#)

Professional Learning & Development



[Full calendar of events](#)

15

"Thank you for empowering parents and making us feel comfortable in this whole new world we are navigating. The educator is brilliant in their delivery."

"Thank you!. The session was interesting, engaging and informative - very helpful."

"The setting & presenter were really welcoming and it was great to hear from others in similar situations, I got lots of ideas from other participants as well as fantastic presenter. She spoke clearly but with a low voice that was very calming and gave plenty of opportunities for participation and questions."

"Our presenter was excellent, very knowledgeable and a skilled communicator. Great at promoting the autistic led voice too. Thank you!"

"This PD was awesome, so informative and Tara's story and insight was so factual providing practical suggestions."

"I thoroughly enjoyed the workshop today and found it very informative and suitable for my position. I would highly recommend this and more school environments would benefit from participating in this workshop. Amanda has a lot of knowledge and was easy to listen to and understand. It was lovely to meet Tara and talk to an Autistic adult."



Learning & Development



This year we focused on building our program to support two separate audiences - the Autistic Community and the General and Professional Community. We appointed skilled Coordinators and launched new web pages to engage with our audiences.

The activity and outcomes are encouraging and tell us we are on track.

Within our Autistic Community (AC) Program we delivered to autistic persons, their families and carers

Within our Professional Development (PD) Program we delivered to a range of school, disability services and general community groups.

Workshops & events by location



16

We delivered 60 workshops (40 AC, 20 PD) to 519 participants (214 AC, 305 PD)

519 participants (7.5% increase) attended 60 workshops (93% increase).
We observed reduced number of participants per workshop due to pandemic impacts.

214 participant attended our Autistic Community Program.
305 attended Professional Development Program.

“

Thank you for another fabulous information session today. You deliver great content and I always come away from the time with you feeling empowered. It feels like you are “parent therapy” Thank you for your positive, caring delivery.

”



Peer & Social Program

Context

Autism Tasmania partnered with The Hawks Football Club. Their commitment to equal participation includes supported entry and access to an autistic safe zones with autism skilled personnel, at all games. Autism Tasmania staff attended 4 games in Launceston and supported this initiative.

Outcomes

Approximately 48 people of all ages chose to take advantage of these inclusion supports - enhancing their social participation.



17

Context

12 members of the autistic community form the Advisory group to co-design the National Assistance Card - Autism trial (Tasmania). This project capacity builds autistic people to be more confident in communicating their needs for understanding and assistance. This project is scheduled for launch in Oct 2022.

Outcomes

The autistic-led advisory group is also the trialled processes for the Autistic community Advisory Subcommittee of the Board. We learned a lot about recruiting and supporting people and we are now ready to establish the new committee that will provide strategic advice to the Board and operational advice to the CEO.



Peer & Social Networks



Autism Tasmania understands that every person has their own unique needs and interests and we are working to expand the range of peer groups available statewide for members of the Autism community.

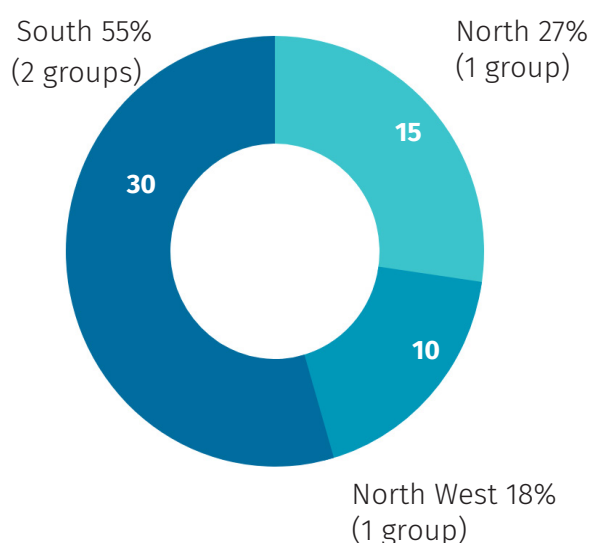
This year has been challenged by the impact of the pandemic and in person Peer meetings were suspending for three months in early January. During this time, the team worked to review and refresh the PSAW program and specifically worked to streamline the resources and supports for PSAW Facilitators.

The Peer & Social Program now includes coordination and development of the Autistic Consultants who are engaged to share their lived experiences as part of the Learning & Development program and other consultancies

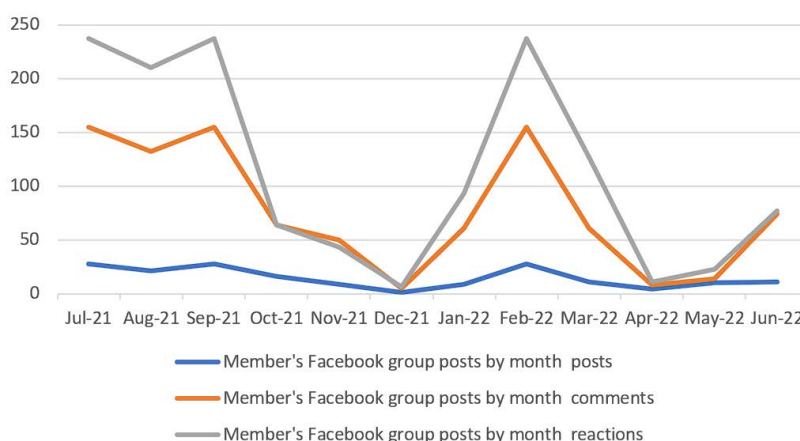
We have three main channels for peer support:

- Peer-led support groups (Peer Support the Autistic Way aka PSAW)
- Social events across Tasmania which foster ongoing connection for parents, children, and adults
- The Autism Tasmania member's Facebook group for networking and discussions

Peer group attendees by location



Member's Facebook Group - Engagement



18

“

I was only diagnosed this year and it was incredible to have the chance to meet others like me and to learn about autism and everyone's experiences. There is so much online, but I prefer to also learn by being with others. I am keen to be chosen to be developed as a Facilitator.

”

Member engagement has increased with 104 new group members (30% increase) engaging by posting, commenting or reacting 2475 times this year.



Federal Election 2022

Shifting the Dial on Autism



Autistic people face much worse life outcomes

Autism affects a large number of Australians. Australia's autistic population is estimated to be around 650,000 with 1 in 4 having an autistic family member. Over 3% of school students have an autism diagnosis.

Autistic students are half as likely to complete Year 10 than the general population, and only half as likely to complete VET or Uni courses than those with other disabilities

Autistic people are 3 times more likely to be unemployed than others with disability, and nearly 8 times the rate of people without disability

50-70% of autistic people experience mental health conditions, with a suicide rate 9 times the general population

More than two thirds of autistic people report feeling socially isolated

The 4 key commitments needed

Autistic people have unique and diverse talents but still experience significantly poorer outcomes in most aspects of life than other Australians, including other major disability types. In the leadup to the 2022 Federal Election, we are calling on all major parties to make the following commitments to improve the lives and lifelong outcomes for ALL autistic Australians and their families:

- 1. Develop and fund a National Autism Strategy**, co-designed with autistic people and their advocates, to provide a coordinated national approach. This must include targets and actions for people of all ages to improve: access and participation in early learning, education and training; employment rates; social and economic participation; community awareness and attitudes; health and wellbeing outcomes; justice; domestic violence and research. Given that the generic disability response has not driven measurable improvements, a dedicated autism strategy is needed. This would best sit as a complementary component to the new Australian Disability Strategy.

The lack of coordinated action comes at high cost to autistic people, their families and the broader Australian community.

- 2. Convene an 'Autism and COVID Summit' in 2022** to identify initiatives in education, training, employment and mental health that address the longtail adverse health, social and economic impacts of COVID. Autistic people overwhelmingly want to work and have much to offer. Tailored responses would enable them to be part of the solution to current and future workforce shortages. The COVID response should also build on recommendations for change from the Select Committee on Autism, expected to report in March 2022.

- 3. Develop a National Roadmap to improve health and mental health outcomes** as has been done for people with intellectual disability, given the appalling health and mental health inequalities currently faced. The Disability Royal Commission has documented the systemic barriers in accessing health services, and we support their call for initiatives to improve understanding of autism among health professionals, addressing affordability and communication barriers in the health system, and providing more autism-friendly health services.

- ▶ 20-36 year lower life expectancy
- ▶ Autistic children and teenagers 10x more likely to present at emergency departments

- 4. Ensure an enduring and effective National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)** by recommitting to its original vision. We encourage the government and community to focus on the long term individual and collective benefits of the NDIS, rather than the short term costs. Disability supports must be continuously improved by:

- Expanding support and services for those not eligible for individual NDIS support packages
- Stronger regulation and care standards to ensure quality supports and to protect participants safety.
- More deliberate market stewardship to ensure better access to services across Australia.
- Co-design in planning and delivery with autistic people, their families, and representative organisations.

- ▶ One third of NDIS participants are autistic
- ▶ The NDIS has been life-changing for autistic people and their families
- ▶ Research shows a \$2.25 community wide benefit for every \$1 invested.

About the Australian Autism Alliance

As a diverse national network of key autism organisations representing and led by autistic people, peak bodies, service providers, and researchers, we can provide expert advice including direct access to autistic people and their families and carers. We reach over half a million people through our communication channels and provide support to people with autism across the lifespan. We look forward to working with the elected government after the election to implement these changes and continue discussions about other areas of reform required to improve the lives of autistic people.

For more information connect with us at australianautismalliance.org.au or contact Alliance Co-Chair Jenny Karavolos at chair@australianautismalliance.org.au or 08 8462 0655.



Representing members



Our advocacy ensures that the voice of the Autistic community is heard and improvements are made. We work to shape the programs and policies at local, state, and national levels. This includes submissions to influence the range of reforms to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

National

Federal Election May 2022

Our *"Shifting the Dial on Autism"* campaign worked! There is now a commitment to implement the recommendations from the Select Senate Commitment on Autism for Australia to develop the 1st National Autism Strategy.

NDIS

Through collaborative advocacy, we stopped the NDIS plans to implement Independent Assessments.

We are actively engaged in responding to NDIS consultation directly and/or through our national partners.

State

State Minister for Disability

The responsibility for the disability portfolio has changed 4 times this year. We welcomed each Minister enthusiastically during each transition.

Disability Services Act 2011

Consultation (December 2021)

Our submission called for SIX key changes to be included in the new legislation.

Local

Autism Tasmania provided expert advice about Autism inclusion strategies at:

- Hobart City Council
- Hobart Airport Access Committee
- Launceston City Council
- UTAS SPEERMENT Group

Covid Preparedness and Response

We collaborated with the State Health Department and Disability services to;

1. Ensure equal access to vaccination clinics and testing facilities
2. Inclusion of autism sensitivities in mandatory mask exemption policies.

20

“

The voice of Autistic Tasmanians must be heard at national, state, and local policy forums. Autism Tasmania partners with national, state, and local organisations

”



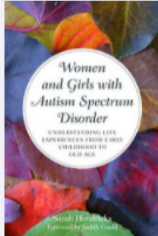
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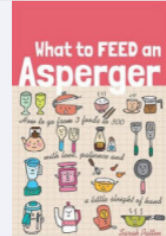


What Is It Like to Be Me?

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Understanding Autism

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21

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Indigenous Storybook
Life Skills
Memoir
Mental Health
NDIS
Parents/Carers Educators
Play Skills

Audience

Audience

Adult Diagnosis
Adults
All children
Children
Educators
Girls
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Professionals
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Teen Girls
Teenager
Teenagers
Teens

Member library



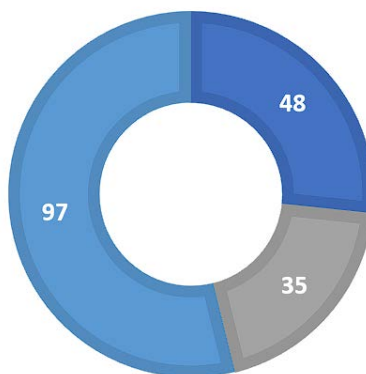
Our member library is a comprehensive Autism-specific reading and viewing collection available for loan. This year we launched our new online library system to increase statewide access to quality resources. Members can now browse and order books online for delivery to their home, or collect in-person from one of our offices.

We have 522 publications available for loan. In 2021/22 we processed 180 book loans to 51 members, which is a 131% increase from the previous financial year.

Our new digital interface will encourage members all over the state to engage with our library ensuring our service is truly statewide and increasing accessibility.

Member Loans By Location

■ North ■ North West ■ South



“

I found the range of books about puberty and teenage development really helpful in encouraging my child to engage in open conversations about their experiences.

”

22

Autism & Meltdowns



A meltdown is an involuntary response to sensory overload, overwhelm, exhaustion, anxiety, change or a combination. Autistic people cannot control meltdowns.

These tips and facts will help you to gently support someone in meltdown.

- Sensory Processing**
 - Autistic brains experience the world differently. **Autistic experiences are real and valid.** Sensory processing differences can mean some sounds, textures, tastes and sensations may be intolerable or painful.
- Ensure Safety**
 - Give the person space.
 - Remove others from the area.
 - Give subtle supervision from a distance.
 - Intervene only if in immediate danger e.g. traffic.
- Reduce Stimulus**
 - Where possible reduce noise, bright lights, and remove triggers.
 - Reduce eye contact.
 - Reduce speech volume.
 - Use a positive and calming tone.
- Do not touch or restrain**
 - Only hold a person if you know it's effective in calming them.
 - This should only be done by someone known well to them.
- Respect cues**
 - If speaking to, being close by, maintaining eye contact, or touching someone increases signs of distress, avoid these where possible.
- Recovery time**
 - Provide drinks, snacks, space and access to a calming or favoured activity.
 - Do not judge, punish, or impose consequences.

Statewide Contacts
(03) 6722 5000
www.autismtas.org.au
autism@autismtas.org.au

To find out more about professional development for your business contact
learning@autismtas.org.au



Autism & Communication



Autistic people may find it difficult to filter out less important information. Too much information can lead to 'overload' where no further information can be processed.

These tips can help you better communicate with Autistic friends or colleagues.

- Engage directly**
 - Use their name at the start.
 - Engage them by talking about what they're doing.
 - Look for signs they are engaged before asking a question or giving an instruction.
- Be clear and concise**
 - Say less and talk slowly.
 - Use key words.
 - Pause between phrases.
 - Don't ask lots of questions.
- Consider literal thinking**
 - Avoid irony, sarcasm, figurative language, rhetorical questions, idioms or exaggeration.
 - If you use these you may need to explain what you really mean.
- Think about visuals**
 - Reduce non-verbal communication like eye contact, body language and gestures if someone seems to be getting annoyed.
 - Use visual aids like timetables.
- Avoid open ended questions**
 - Keep questions short.
 - Ask only necessary questions.
 - Offer answer choices.
 - Be specific e.g. "Did you enjoy your lunch?" instead of "How was your day?"
- Be aware of the environment**
 - Bright lights, noise, or a crowded room may affect how much information someone can process.

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Autism: Strengths

Understanding, embracing and celebrating different kinds of minds benefits everyone. Think about how these autistic strengths bring value to our families and communities.

- Attention to detail**
 - Thoroughness
 - Accuracy
- Deep focus**
 - Concentration
 - Freedom from distraction
- Observational skills**
 - Others look, learn approach
 - Fact finding
- Absorb and retain facts**
 - Excellent long-term memory
 - Superior recall
- Visual skills**
 - Visual learning and recall
 - Detail focused
- Expertise**
 - In-depth knowledge
 - High level of skills
- Methodical approach**
 - Analytical
 - Spotting patterns, repetition
- Novel approaches**
 - Unique thought processes
 - Innovative solutions
- Creativity**
 - Distinctive imagination
 - Expression of ideas
- Tenacity and resilience**
 - Determination
 - Challenge opinions
- Accepting of difference**
 - Less likely to judge others
 - May question norms
- Integrity**
 - Honesty, loyalty
 - Commitment

Remember: Every experience of autism is unique. No one person will identify with every positive feature of autism. We all have individual skills, attributes and characteristics that are as unique as our personalities – this is the power of neurodiversity.

Adapted from work of the National Autistic Society, Disability Services University of Leeds 2018

Statewide Contacts and Service Locations

(03) 6722 5000
www.autismtas.org.au
autism@autismtas.org.au

South Head Office: Level 2, 1st Collins Street, Hobart 7000
Monday to Friday: 9am to 3pm
North: 20 Tamar St, Launceston
Monday to Friday (by appointment)
North West: 11 King St, Burnie
Tuesday to Thursday: 10am to 2pm
(by appointment)



Terminology Policy

When in personal communication with someone on the Autism spectrum, it is respectful to follow their lead in terms of how they would like to be referred to in regard to their Autism (for example: Autistic, person on the Autism spectrum, person with Autism, person with ASD, **Person with Asperger's/ Asperger's Syndrome**).



Position Statement

Terminology Policy

The language used to describe autism is important.
Many different preferences are evident and expressed by Autistic
Tasmanian's and their loved ones.
No single terminology preference is right or wrong.



Preferred Terminology

The terminology used by Autism Tasmania in its communications and publications is guided by the advice of the Autism Cooperative Research Centre (Autism CRC): <https://www.autismcrc.com.au/language-choice> Importantly, this advice is consistent with preferences expressed in two recent member surveys:

1. The Autism Tasmania Members Survey September 2018
2. The Autism Tasmania Members Survey September 2020 to inform Autism Training for Allied Health Professionals

Autism Tasmania's published materials and communications use the following terms interchangeably:

- Autism
- Autism spectrum
- Autistic person
- Person on the Autism spectrum
- Person on the spectrum
- Autistic community (refers collectively to people on the Autism spectrum)
- Autism community (refers collectively to people on the Autism spectrum and their family, friends, and allies).

When in personal communication with someone on the Autism spectrum, it is respectful to follow their lead in terms of how they would like to be referred to in regard to their Autism (for example: Autistic, person on the Autism spectrum, person with Autism, person with ASD, **Person with Asperger's/ Asperger's Syndrome**).

24

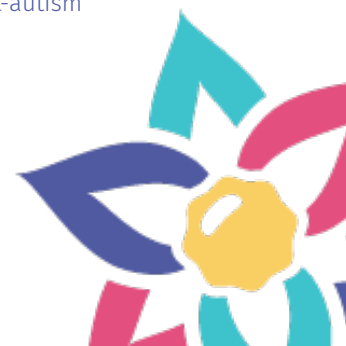
Non-Preferred Terminology

Autism Tasmania is guided by the recent member surveys and by position statements of key national and international Autistic-led or Autistic-informed organisations (ASAN-NZ, Australian Autism Alliance, Autism Journal, National Autistic Society UK) to avoid use of language which pathologises or stigmatises Autism. In particular, the following terms are avoided:

- Functioning labels (e.g. High/low, severe/mild): Many Autistic adults and family members express that dividing autistic people into categories does not fully represent the diverse abilities and challenges faced
- Has Autism
- Person/child/adult with Autism
- ASD / Disorder (unless in specific reference to the diagnosis).

References

ASAN-AU/NZ: <https://www.asan-au.org/autistic-the-word/>
Autism CRC: <https://www.autismcrc.com.au/language-choice>
Autism Journal: https://us.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/autism_terminology_guidelines.pdf National Autistic Society UK: <https://www.autism.org.uk/what-we-do/help-and-support/how-to-talk-about-autism>





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Launceston office

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Launceston, TAS
7250

Burnie office

9 King Street
Burnie, TAS 7320