





Autistics' Guide to Adulthood photo.



Pathways Consultant Peta Richards and a child in a therapy room at Elizabeth.

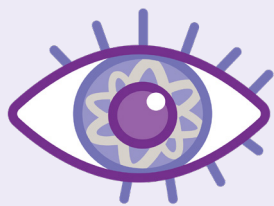


Autism SA acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first inhabitants of the nation and the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we live, learn and work.

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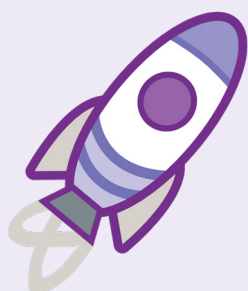
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Our Vision, Mission and Values



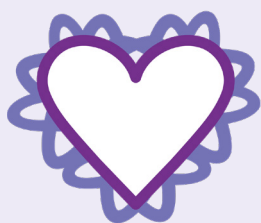
Our Vision

Each person on the autism spectrum lives the life they choose in an inclusive society



Our Mission

Is to be the first choice for individuals on the autism spectrum, supporting them to turn their potential into reality



Our Values

- We care about people
- We have integrity and honesty
- We work together
- We are innovative and problem solve
- We provide dignity and respect
- We have ambition
- We harness heart

About Autism SA

Every family has a story — here is ours...

Autism SA was founded in 1964 by autistic individuals and their families to ensure that other people in the community had access to the best information, education and support. The group also advocated for acceptance and understanding of autism and encouraged research and leadership in the community.

Autism SA was the first organisation of its kind in Australia.

Since its beginnings, Autism SA has focused on empowering the autism community and has been at the forefront of service development and advocacy. The organisation has a long and rich history of being a recognised leader in providing services and supports to people on the autism spectrum, their families, and the broader community.

Autism SA has over 15,000 registered individuals on the autism spectrum and prides itself on a strong values-driven culture of empowering autistic people. Our team provides a range of services and supports to individuals, their families, as well as associated professionals and organisations. Our team operates from various locations including clinics, in-home, the wider community and in schools.

Autism SA remains true to its foundations, always putting our clients at the centre of everything we do and empowering people on the spectrum to live the life they choose.

Autism SA continues to redesign and evolve how we operate to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the community. As an organisation, we partner with the community to identify gaps in services, supports or policies so we can advocate for change. We support and encourage activities that build an inclusive society.

We inspire a culture of engaged passionate staff who are connected to our vision, mission and values to ensure that we deliver quality services and supports to our clients.

We strive to ensure our activities are sustainable and meet our high standards for service quality and ethical practice and generate positive, person-centred outcomes for individuals, families, carers, and others supporting our community. Respecting and protecting people's human rights is at the centre of our decision making.

Autism SA advocates for policy change locally and nationally. Autism SA is a member of the Autism Education Advisory Group, the Australian Autism Alliance and a Board member of the Australian Advisory Board on Autism.

Being a strong representative voice for the Autistic and autism community is the reason we exist.



AUTISTICS' GUIDE TO ADULTHOOD

Chair's report



Richard Price
Board Chair

Welcome to the Autism SA 2022/23 Annual Report, where we reflect upon the accomplishments and challenges we've faced over the last financial year.

As the Chair of the Board, I am privileged to share with you our journey of resilience and adaptability, and our steadfast commitment to our vision that each person on the autism spectrum lives the life they choose in an inclusive society.

Staff have worked incredibly hard to implement challenging organisational changes to reduce our costs, but even so we have once again faced a tough year financially, reporting a loss of \$1.7 million for the 2022/23 financial year.

Tight labour market conditions are limiting the number of clients we can support, which impacts our revenue. Add to this that the NDIS price schedule has not kept up with staff costs, and our operating margin is further impacted.

This is a disappointing outcome, but it has only strengthened the organisation's resolve to achieve a substantial improvement in our financial position in the coming year. Indeed, it will be critical to Autism SA's sustainability in our current form that we do so.

We've implemented measures to save costs including a restructure of corporate services that commenced in June 2023 and a major investment to overhaul and upgrade our Customer Relationship Management system, which holds all the data about our clients and processes billing.

We are one of the few organisations to maintain a full breadth of supports to our community and up until now have been able to maintain services that are not directly funded. These include our invaluable Infoline, online chat and Newly Diagnosed Support services, staffed by a dedicated team who provide trusted and reliable information about autism. As the peak body for autism in SA we pride ourselves in providing these services, but we are looking at ways to make them more sustainable, aiming to partner with other businesses to help fund them.

Politically and in the media this year we have seen a lot of negative commentary around autism and the burden this places on the NDIS. Much of this is unfair and creates a very uncertain environment for our community and staff. We are hopeful that the NDIS review currently taking place will address this uncertainty.

However, there is much to celebrate from last year, including being awarded an Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) grant to create an online platform that helps employers adopt inclusive recruitment practices. Autistic people are under-represented in the workforce with a participation rate of 38% for autistic people of working age compared with 84.1% of those without disability according to the Autism CRC (Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism). This is something we are looking to overcome and the grant is just one way we are tackling this issue.

Another highlight of the year, which also happens to encompass addressing employment for autistic people, was the launch of the Autistics' Guide to Adulthood. The online resource consists of 10 learning modules, which were identified and co-developed by autistic people. The employment module has proved to be one of the most popular topics.

We also commenced our Work My Way program that helps school leavers build their skills and confidence to secure jobs. You'll find a story in these pages of one of the participants, Brittany, and learn how she has harnessed the opportunities to pursue her career aspirations.

When reading the annual report I'm always impressed by how much our team achieves, from providing therapeutic services, to the assistance provided by support workers, to the connections made with people all over the country to inform and empower them with credible information about autism, and to improving accessibility and inclusion across our state and so much more. This is evidence of our reach and impact, and the positive outcome it has on the Autistic community is something I am very grateful for and proud to be part of.

I thank the Board and Autism SA staff and members for their ongoing commitment to improve the lives of autistic people.

Thank you to our partners in the State and Federal Government, our corporate partners and donors for your support of both Autism SA and the Autistic and autism community.

Finally, my sincerest thanks to the Autistic and autism community for guiding Autism SA, and a special thanks to our clients, their families and carers for your continued support and trusting us with your care. It is a privilege for us to work with you.

Thank you,

Richard.

CEO's report



Helen Graham
Chief Executive Officer

As an organisation that achieves a great deal across a range of services and supports, there is a common theme of access and inclusion in all that we do.

Autism SA has a long history – 60 years next year! – of striving to ensure that our society is accessible and inclusive for all. This year we saw further evidence of this as we delivered our services and worked with partners to make South Australian supermarkets, events, workplaces, homes and schools more accessible and inclusive.

It's been a big year in government for autism, with the appointment of the Honourable Emily Bourke as the state's Assistant Minister for Autism, a first for our nation. We've been delighted to work with Minister Bourke to share our knowledge and insights of autism and the sector, and to collaborate on many initiatives including an autism strategy workshop for public servants that we facilitated.

We also provided a submission for the state's autism strategy and were thrilled when the community, after being given a choice of multiple definitions of autism created by various autism organisations, chose ours!

Our definition was produced through consultation with the Autistic community, which just proves that better outcomes are achieved when we listen to the Autistic community and ensure our practices include them.

I commend both the Federal and State Governments for their action and progress on creating their autism strategies. I also commend the South Australian State Government for starting their long journey in the autism space with their initiative to develop an autism charter and by implementing Autism Inclusion Teachers in schools across the state.

I'm excited to see this initiative evolve and, given our history and experience working in schools, we aim to be an important part of it in the future. Indeed I see many possibilities for Autism SA to partner with the State Government and wider autism community to improve inclusion of autistic people in our society.

This year we partnered with Drakes to deliver the Quiet Time shopping hours at selected stores. This initiative was praised by the autism community, particularly as it was offered in evening hours which was preferable for many people who can't get to the shops during the day.

We once again partnered with the Adelaide Fringe to improve accessibility for the autistic community, which included providing a guide to artists to help them make their events more autism friendly.

Autism SA's definition of autism

Autism is a neurological developmental difference that changes the way an individual relates to the environment and people in it. Autism changes the way that an individual sees, experiences and understands the world. There is not one way that an autistic individual experiences the world, this is why the term 'spectrum' is used - this is to reflect the fact that every individual's lived experience of autism is different.

We were thrilled to receive a generous donation from Cops for Kids that enabled us to purchase resources to provide a mobile sensory zone, allowing us to make community events more accessible for kids and adults alike who would benefit from a reprieve from highly stimulating environments.

This year the ideas and input of hundreds of autistic people from around the country came to realisation when we launched the Autistics' Guide to Adulthood, a free, online resource to support autistic people to navigate the everyday challenges and triumphs that come with being an adult.

We were also proud to receive yet another ILC grant from the Department of Social Services for an inclusive recruitment project which we look forward to launching in 2024.

Despite achieving so much, it is disappointing to have had another difficult year financially. We continue to address our financial challenges and are constantly adapting our services and operations to achieve financial sustainability, while ensuring the continued delivery of our high-quality services.

We have invested heavily in a new Customer Relationship Management system, the full benefits of which won't be seen until the 2023/24 financial year. I am confident, given the hard yards that have been put into transitioning to the new system, the process improvements and efficiencies will yield financial benefits for years to come.

We were also proud to develop our Employee Value Proposition through consultation with our staff, to find out what it is they love about working at Autism SA and what sets us apart from other workplaces. It was very clear that the connection with our clients is what keeps our staff engaged and rewarded. We now use this proposition, which you can read about in the *Our People* section of this report, to attract new staff to our organisation.

In a time when anti-autism rhetoric has escalated thanks to the ballooning costs of the NDIS, we have strengthened our partnerships with others in the autism sector to counter the negative discourse. Our seat on the Australian Advisory Board on Autism has been crucial in driving autism advocacy at a national level, and with the NDIS review currently taking place, together with other autism peak bodies we have made recommendations to improve the NDIS for participants.

I extend my thanks to our partners, both corporate and government, our funding bodies, donors and supporters, all of which help enable us to advocate and take action to make our society more inclusive and accessible.

I thank the Board for their ongoing support and guidance throughout the year.

I thank our incredible team for their passion, commitment and dedication to the Autistic and autism community, and for making Autism SA such a supportive and rewarding place to work.

And I thank our clients and their families and carers, for inspiring us to do better, to be innovative and to push boundaries.

It's for you that we exist, and because of you that we continue to strive to make South Australia more inclusive and accessible for all.



Helen Graham speaking at the Autistics' Guide to Adulthood launch.

Autistics' Guide to Adulthood



Autistics' Guide to Adulthood photo, two people on a bench. Bottom right - Grace Colsey smiling.

In April 2023 we were proud to launch the Autistics' Guide to Adulthood, a free, online, life-skills resource, designed by autistic adults for autistic adults.

Autistic people were at the heart of the guide's development which includes first-hand reflections, personal anecdotes and learnings from people on the spectrum. A National Advisory Group of autistic people supported the development of all the content, ensuring it is relevant and meets the needs of the Autistic community.

The topics covered in the resource were selected through a national survey of over 400 autistic adults.

The survey results showed that the number one topic of interest was mental health, with over 80% of people stating this was an area they wanted more support with.

The Guide

The Autistics' Guide to Adulthood covers self-advocacy, friendship, physical health, mental health, communication, independent living, employment, education, entertainment, and romantic relationships.

"Our philosophy of '*nothing about us without us*' has informed the entire project, from research and planning, to the brand name and design, to content production – nothing has been done without significant input from our community," says Dorian Tisato, a member of the project team and National Advisory Group.

Grace Colsey is featured in the guide sharing their personal experiences of being autistic.

"I think it's great that there are interviews with autistic people in the guide. It's important for autistic people to hear autistic voices," says Grace.

The Launch

Fifty people attended the launch at our Tonsley office including members of the National Advisory Group, the Assistant Minister for Autism The Honourable Emily Bourke, and Member for Elder Nadia Clancy.

It was a celebration of four years of hard work by the project team, the engagement of over 500 people – 94% of them autistic – and the creation of a guide that was informed and led by autistic people.

“I can say hand on heart that this will have a huge impact on the wider autistic community in Australia,” said Dorian when he addressed the audience, **“It gives autistic adults a guide to help build the life they want.”**

The Feedback

From the Guide’s launch in April to June 2023, the website had over 6,600 visitors, with the top three most popular modules being Communication, Friendship and Employment.

The free, online resource has been developed by Autism SA and funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services. Go to www.dss.gov.au for more information.

Most popular modules



Communication



Friendship



Employment



6600+

visitors on the website within the first 3 months



Photo of the National Advisory Group with Autism SA CEO Helen Graham, Group Facilitator Greg Healy, Research, Project Manager Niki Welz and Hon. Emily Bourke MLC.



“I like the framework, the information provided, how it was presented and what was covered. I think this was a really useful module to have engaged with and feel it met my needs to a high standard.”

- Renae, Self Advocacy module



“It has given me some new strategies and helped me feel more confident with what I know. I am going to start trying to cook meals at home more often and look further into independent living options for me.”

- L. Dunn, Living Independently module



Autistics' Guide to Adulthood photo, two people smiling.

Peak Body activities

As the Peak Body for Autism in South Australia, we make it our priority to provide free, accessible, reliable information about autism to the wider community, and to advocate and foster a society that includes, empowers and appreciates autistic individuals and their allies.

Autism SA is committed to partnering with other organisations to produce research, projects and resources that benefit the autism community. Through collaboration with various stakeholders, institutions and delivery of impactful projects and advocacy efforts, Autism SA continues to play a pivotal role in enhancing the lives of those we serve.

Research

Through the Autism SA Professional Practice Committee eight research applications have been reviewed and endorsed, supporting the connection between researchers and the autism community in South Australia.

Other the past 12 months, Autism SA has partnered with various research institutes including Adelaide University, the University of South Australia, Flinders University and Griffith University to progress six different research projects:

- Can LEGO® robotics therapy improve the mental health and social skills of adolescents on the autism spectrum? A Phase 1 trial
- Evaluation: Autistics' Guide to Adulthood
- The use of off-the-shelf game, Minecraft® to promote social collaboration skills in autistic pre-teens: A pilot study
- Staff perceptions of the value and practical implementation of a foundation skills program for children with autism spectrum disorder: Thesis
- Parents' perceptions of changes in their child and family since being involved with a foundation skills group for children with autism spectrum disorder: Thesis
- Evaluation: Building Employer Confidence Project



8

Research applications were reviewed & endorsed



6

Research projects were progressed this year

Projects

- Launched The Autistics' Guide to Adulthood, a personal growth learning management system designed and developed by adults on the spectrum and experienced professionals, for the benefit of autistic adults.
- Won an ILC: Building Employer Confidence grant and commenced the *'Realising the Benefits of a truly inclusive, neurodivergent workforce - A digital platform enabling Australian employers to confidently recruit the people who matter'* project. The project is due for launch at the end of 2024.
- Partnered with the Australian Hotels Association (SA) to commence the *Pubs with Heart: Enhancing Inclusion and Accessibility project*. It's aimed at making venues across SA more accessible and inclusive for autistic patrons, employees and jobseekers.

Advocacy

To ensure the SA autism community's experiences, opinions and recommendations influence at a state and national level we have made three submissions over the year, and provided consultations including:

- South Australian Autism Strategy Submission
- NDIS General Inquiry Submission
- Supporting Students and Young people in Western Australia Submission
- Community Access and Inclusion Survey - Mission Australia

Improving accessibility and inclusion one supermarket at a time



Rhiannon Pearce MP (Member for King), Autism SA Administration Assistant David Palmer, Director of Drakes Supermarkets John-Paul Drake, Hon. Emily Bourke MLC, Autism SA CEO Helen Graham, Autism SA volunteer Jamie Rossiter and Autism SA Receptionist Anna Hennessy celebrate the launch of Quiet Time shopping hours.

In line with our vision that each person on the autism spectrum lives the life they choose in an inclusive society, we were thrilled to partner with Drakes Supermarkets to implement a trial of 'Quiet Time' shopping hours in their Hallett Cove and Golden Grove stores.

Currently, most inclusive shopping hours occur in the middle of the day, but we received feedback from many in the Autistic community that having quiet time shopping after work hours would be beneficial.

Drakes piloted inclusive shopping hours from 6pm on Tuesday evenings, and the trial was warmly welcomed by the autism community.

1,100 heart and like reactions on our Facebook post announcing the initiative

In fact, feedback from the community was so overwhelming that our Facebook post announcing the initiative was seen by over 100,000 people, with numerous comments praising Drakes for taking such a positive step towards inclusion and accessibility.

In addition to consulting with Drakes to advise what measures the two sites could implement to support a low sensory environment, we also created resources such as visual and sensory maps, social narratives about what to expect when visiting a store and communication boards to help shoppers who might not speak to get their message across. We further provided autism inclusion training to Drakes staff, to support acceptance and understanding.

The trial of quiet time at Drakes was a huge success and they continued to provide it at the two stores.

Digital reach

Our digital platforms continue to be popular resources for people seeking reliable information about autism, learning about what supports and services are available to them and connecting with the wider autism community.



Autism SA

881,296

visitors to the website during the year

 16,200+ followers

 3000+ followers

 3500+ followers



Autism Friendly Charter

6,559

visitors to the website during the year



The Spectrum

858,923

visitors to the website during the year



Autistics' Guide to Adulthood

6,600

visitors since its launch in April 2023

Major donors and partners



Baiada SA Sales Manager Chris Chrisanthopoulos, Baiada General Manager SA Dada Hu and Autism SA CEO Helen Graham.

We are grateful for the support of government departments, businesses, charities and community members who help create and promote an inclusive society so that each person on the autism spectrum lives the life they choose.

Your donations and support are vital to our success and ultimately provide better outcomes for our clients and the Autistic community. Thank you!

Major donors and supporters include:

- Baiada Children's Charity Nest
- Marinis Financial Group
- Cops for Kids
- Variety Children's Charity SA
- Beyond Bank
- Efix
- CBB - Community Business Bureau
- StreetFleet
- Expr3ss
- MRS Property
- CBS Inc.
- Private donors and bequests
- Department of Child Protection
- Department of Human Services
- Department of Social Services
- National Disability Insurance Agency

We were also delighted to receive donations from hundreds of individuals and community fundraisers throughout the year. Thank you to each and every one of you for your support.

Thanks to our donors we raised almost

\$200,000

Making the Fringe even more inclusive

We were proud to once again partner with the Adelaide Fringe Festival, helping make the world class event even more inclusive and accessible. As part of our partnership we provided a guide for artists and venues to make their events more autism friendly and also provided autism awareness and inclusion training to over 150 volunteers.



Autism SA Creative Marketing Coordinator Hannah Badenhop and 2023 Fringe Ambassador Kween Kong.

New sensory room

Thanks to the support of Variety Children's Charity SA we were able to install a sensory room at the entry of our Tonsley office, providing a welcoming and inclusive space that's available to the public.



A child enjoys the new sensory room at Tonsley.

Mobile sensory zone and therapy room upgrades

We were thrilled to receive a generous donation from Cops for Kids to purchase a mobile sensory zone to provide at community events, making them more inclusive. Thanks to the donation we also upgraded an office space at our Elizabeth Hub into an interactive therapy room.



Autism SA Marketing Coordinator Laura Craig in front of the mobile sensory zone at a community event.

Home upgrades

Through the support of Variety SA we were able to fit out a purpose designed home featuring a sensory room. This long term accommodation will be customised for autistic children through partnership with the Department of Child Protection.



Autism SA Executive Manager Corporate Services Monique Palmer, Variety SA Grants Coordinator Meredy Bochow, Autism SA Executive Manager Clinical, Care and Community Excellence Rebecca Morton and Variety SA Marketing Manager Sue Rogers at the home.

Autism SA in the community



Clinical Lead Occupational Therapist Amy Smith at the Gawler Inclusive Play Day.

A great way for us to connect with people and organisations and advocate for the Autistic community is to get out to events. We're always humbled by the autistic people that come and speak to us, feeling safe and supported to share their personal stories.

We attended several events this year including:

- Gawler Inclusive Play Day
- Autism Expo – Hosted by the Hon. Emily Bourke
- KYD-X Expo
- Disability Ageing and Lifestyle Expo
- Anglicare Community Talk
- My Time – Family Support Groups at O'Sullivan's Beach, Hackam and Aldinga
- Lake Windermere Colour Carnival
- Northern Senior School Expo
- National Science Week – Tonsley MAB Centre
- ONE Community – Ready Set Connect and Ready Set Home Event
- Adelaide Careers and Employment Expo
- Family fun day - Pooraka Farm Community Centre

Adelaide Careers and Employment Expo

This expo was a great way for us to highlight our various career opportunities as well as share our resources such as Autistics' Guide to Adulthood and our services. We also had people with lived experience of autism talk to us about their employment experiences. Overall it was a great chance to boost interest in working for Autism SA and engage with the wider community.



Creative Marketing Coordinator Hannah Badenhop and HR Business Partner Cherry Bi at the Adelaide Careers and Employment Expo.

Disability Ageing and Lifestyle Expo

The DAL Expo is an annual event where thousands of people visit the Wayville Showgrounds to learn about the many services and supports available to them. In addition to our regular stall we were proud to provide a sensory space, helping to make the event more inclusive and accessible. Designed by our therapy team, the space was visited by hundreds of people and we received positive feedback about the difference it made having it available.



Photo of the Autism SA Stall at the Disability Ageing and Lifestyle Expo.



Clinical Lead Speech Pathologist Emily McVeigh and Clinical Lead Occupational Therapist Amy Smith at the Disability Ageing and Lifestyle Expo.

"I've loved connecting with the community to hear first hand what the current needs are of autistic people and their families."
- Emily McVeigh
Clinical Lead Speech Pathology

Keeping our community connected



Pathways Consultant Peta Richards on the computer in the Elizabeth office.

Our Infoline and online chat continued to be in high demand, with our dedicated team connecting with 8,400 people seeking autism advice and support during the year.

Our team is there for people wanting to know anything about autism – from what to do next after receiving a diagnosis, to finding out what support is available for them or their loved one, or providing practical tips. Teachers and other professionals also often contact us for advice and guidance.

As the peak body for autism in SA we offer this vital information service for free, ensuring that people from all over the state have access to reliable information about autism and the supports available to them.

When people contact our Infoline and online chat, they are connecting with a small team who have years of experience in the autism sector. They provide practical and reliable information about autism and have extensive knowledge about the available services and supports for autism across the state.

Our goal is to ensure that people get the support they are seeking, when they need it.

Peta Richards (pictured) is one of the team members. She loves getting to speak with people from all over South Australia – and interstate too.

“There are people who have been given a diagnosis and they have no idea what to do or what’s available to them,” she says.

“When they call us there’s this sense of relief, they’ve got someone to talk to who understands”

“We’ll give them phone numbers of providers. We’ll touch base with them before they go in for their NDIS plan, which can be quite daunting, going in there with people talking this NDIS language”

“We help by going through the next steps after getting a diagnosis, but also suggest some proactive strategies that they can do at home, or in the school or childcare centre (if they’re a parent and their child has received an autism diagnosis) that are going to get quick results”

We pride ourselves on being a trusted source for people seeking information and support.

"Your clear and efficient advice feels like it is the light at the end of a very dark and murky tunnel...what you all do, is so very important, but it's the way that you provide this service that makes the difference."

- Online chat user

"Fantastic time response and follow up. Live chat function was great. I will recommend to friends. I work with so many services that take so much time to hear back from or get answers, the assistance was faster than expected."

- Online chat user

 **8400+**
connections with people to our Infoline and Online chat this year.

 **20%**
of people who contact the Infoline and Online chat are from regional South Australia.

Newly Diagnosed Support Service

Our Infoline team are also behind our Newly Diagnosed Support Service. Individuals, parents and carers can feel overwhelmed and unsure of what to do next when they or someone in their family receives an autism diagnosis.

The Newly Diagnosed Support Service offers an online, phone or in person meeting to provide support, guidance and comfort and to explore possibilities. There is no other service like this in South Australia.

 **1100+**
people supported this year

 **9700+**
people supported since the service commenced in 2019

Setting up little ones with skills for life



Foundation Skills Group team members Caitlin Webb, Tiani Sbrissa-Jeffries and Cara McInerney.

The Foundation Skills Group at Netley is for autistic children aged three to five. It operates Monday to Friday, allowing families to drop their child off for a day of learning and play in a group setting.

What sets the Foundation Skills Group apart from childcare or kindergarten is that children spend the day with a team of Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Behavioural Therapists and Early Childhood Educators in an environment designed to nurture children on the spectrum. Together they help children and families achieve goals, and foster each child's strengths and interests.

Amanda's four-year-old son attended Netley Foundation Skills Group two days a week and within a term Amanda noticed the positive impacts the program had on her son.

"He didn't used to play with other children. When children got too close to him he would dysregulate and want to push them away, but now he has the confidence to sit with other children and play with them," says Amanda.

"It's been great the way staff have supported him. He's getting really tailored support and help with fine motor skills."

"He's learning how to grip a pencil and he's taking interest in fine motor skills that he wouldn't have previously. He would have got frustrated."

With a maximum of 10 children in a room, the little ones are supported to develop skills in communication, social interactions, movement, play, self-care and behaviour.

A range of whole group, small group and one-to-one activities are incorporated into the daily routine. The group learning environment also provides opportunities for positive social interactions with both peers and adults.

Staff member Tiani Sbrissa-Jeffries loves working at the Foundation Skills Group.

"It's very rewarding seeing the kids grow, progress and achieve their goals."

She also enjoys the positive feedback from parents.

"Parents are so impressed with the program. They tell us how they can see the difference at home, including the way their child engages with family and friends."



130+

children enrolled in the Foundation Skills Group

Key highlights:

- Harnessed the diverse strengths and benefits of a multi-disciplinary team to deliver a holistic, strengths-based early childhood program.
- Improved site facilities to enhance safety and operational efficiency.
- Expanded our allied health assistant workforce, providing career opportunities for allied health students and increasing our capacity to meet the growing demand for our services.

Early Childhood

With a focus on building capacity for educators in kindergartens, early childhood centres and parents and caregivers, this program's focus on helping children adapt to early learning continued to thrive this financial year.

Key highlights:

- Ongoing dedication to empowering families and caregivers by offering a diverse range of support resources, tailored to the unique needs of children.
- Provided invaluable assistance to children, their families, and support teams as they transitioned into preschool and reception, ensuring a smooth and positive start to their educational journey.



100+

children supported

School Inclusion Program

We run two services that have the shared aim of keeping autistic students engaged in their schooling, ensuring they feel supported and valued.

Supporting Educators

Through funding from the Department of Education our Autism Engagement Advisors work directly with educators and learning support staff, building their capacity to cater to the unique needs of autistic students. School staff are equipped with the skills, knowledge and resources to effectively tailor the learning environment.

Our team has been focusing on:

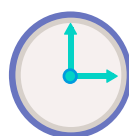
- Cultivating strong relationships and collaborating with the Department for Education, Catholic, and Independent schools.
- Implementing evidence based strategies to support autistic students at school.
- Building our workforce to implement quality services in more schools.

Supporting children

Autistic children with NDIS packages can be supported by our Autism Inclusion Practitioners. Our team delivers therapeutic support to children in their school environment.

Our key areas of focus include:

- Delivering exceptional services that align with evolving evidence-based strategies and best-practice standards.
- Investing in workforce development to ensure consistent and high quality support.



12,500+

hours of support provided



"The program allows me to work in the school setting to support our clients and advocate for the inclusion of autistic individuals. I love working in a team of passionate and knowledgeable professionals."

- Kaitlyn Maxwell-Davis
Autism Inclusion Practitioner

Diagnostics

Our Diagnostic service continues to be in high demand. We received 1280 referrals, a 22% increase on the previous year. The largest increase of referrals was for adults, particularly over the age of 25.



178

Diagnostic assessments



78%

received an autism diagnosis

Psychology, Behaviour Support, Social Work and Counselling (PBSC)

With increasing dedication to offering tailored support to meet psychological, emotional and behavioural needs of individuals, the past year has seen PBSC expand to offer greater support and facilitation of programs.

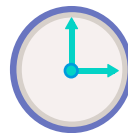
Key highlights:

- Expansion of psychology internship program to empower those starting in the field to work with autistic individuals.
- Continued commitment to evidence-informed resources and strategies, supporting and encouraging clients to achieve their goals.



360+

clients



5,400+

hours of support provided



"We are constantly learning and adapting as new evidence emerges and more resources become available for the Autistic community, ensuring we provide therapies to suit the individual needs of our clients."

- Shazleen Azeez

Business Unit Lead – Psychology, Behaviour Support, Social Work & Counselling



Speech Pathology and Occupational Therapy

Autism SA's dedicated Speech Pathologists and Occupational Therapists continued to use neurodiversity-affirming and evidence-informed practices, resources and strategies to support clients of all ages to thrive.

Key highlights:

- Expansion of new graduate program, empowering new graduate therapists to build their skills in group and 1:1 programs.
- Tailoring of programs to embrace a more inclusive and neurodiversity-affirmative approach to therapy, ensuring our services meet the diverse needs of our clients.
- Enhanced access through 1:1 ratio group-based programs, enabling individuals to connect with their peers in a group setting while offering additional support to those who may benefit from individualised support.

 **840+**
clients

 **11,000**
hours of support provided



Senior Speech Pathologist Emma Connell with a client during an Aqua Skills session.



"As an OT I get to support autistic people and their families to build skills and confidence... it's a very rewarding experience."

- Dave Peterkin, Occupational Therapist

Support Coordination

Our support coordination team assists individuals on the autism spectrum and their families to understand the NDIS funding that is available to them and what can be expected from support services.

A pivotal role of the support coordination team is coordinating the people and organisations around a client to ensure the best possible outcomes for them. This includes working with the family and community members who support the client, educators, the NDIS and providers, Allied Health professionals and guardians.

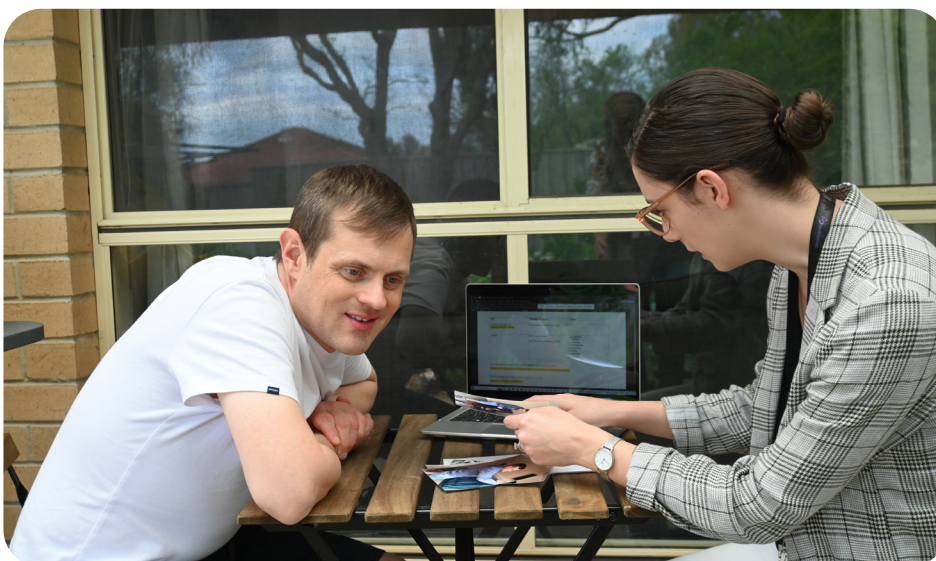
 **200+**
people used support coordination

Home, Living and Lifestyle

Our Home Living and Lifestyle service encompasses Supported Independent Living, providing 24/7 supports to individuals and families, from children through to adults.

We pride ourselves in providing tailored care that supports each autistic individual's needs. We ensure they are matched with the right team of support workers to achieve their personal goals. We fit out homes to best support each client's preferences and interests, with many of our homes having dedicated sensory rooms. This year we increased community participation for clients through day options including bush walking and visiting parks and shopping centres.

 **237**
clients across our Home Living and Lifestyle services



Client Mark with Clinical Lead Speech Pathologist Emily McVeigh.

Make way for Work My Way



Make My Way participant Brittany at Copenhagen Ice Cream.

We were proud to commence our new School Leaver Employment Support program *Work My Way* in January this year.

The job-ready program offers pre-employment skills, career exploration, and hands-on practical work experience for school leavers and adults who wish to get started on their employment journey.

Brittany is one of the participants. Through the Work My Way program she secured work experience at a Copenhagen Ice Cream store.

"Participating in Work My Way has helped me tremendously to gain confidence and do work experience, as well as put my resume out to as many cafe businesses as possible. That was the one thing I thought I would never be able to do a year or two ago, and yet here I am!"
says Brittany.

She says she has learnt a lot about herself since participating in the program.

"I have learnt that I am a visual and verbal learner. If you give me a job to do, I learn by being shown first, then I can give it a go"

"I am not super vocal if I'm not comfortable and I may get very tense in stressful situations"

"I am very kind, have a peaceful personality and I'm hard-working. I have fairly high standards."

The Work My Way participants meet as a group once a week, then have dedicated weekly one-to-one time with Employment Pathways Trainer Jason Mason.

Jason says it's been a privilege to work with participants and see their growth socially and emotionally, and the confidence boost they've had with their interview skills and communication.

"The strength of character of the participants has been immense. They step out of their comfort zones to achieve their goals and attain little wins."

The participants are supported to gain skills and work experience dependent on where they are at in their job-seeking journey.

Brittany says she really enjoys serving customers.

"It was a little nerve-racking at first but I gained confidence quite quickly. Being behind the counter made me feel in charge. I kept in mind that I was pleasing customers, so I kept my smile going and would say 'Have a great day!' as a leaving message."

Brittany says her dream job at the moment is to be a barista, and she is currently participating in a hospitality course to help achieve this.

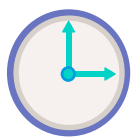
"Brittany has built good working relationships with employers and employees along the way. She's oozed with confidence and self-belief over the past three months, it's been a real joy to witness," says Jason.



Employment Pathways trainer Jason Mason with Brittany.

Community Groups and Programs

Work My Way is one of our group programs that aims to support autistic teenagers and adults to achieve their goals. Our other groups include Alpha and Explorers which focus on life skills and social connections through fun activities. Following the success of our group offerings we are looking to expand them in the coming year.



2,800

hours of support through our Alpha and Explorer groups



43

participants in our community groups

Our People



Autism SA team members Keith Hoskins and Saloni Shah. Top right - Natalie Davies. Bottom right - David Peterkin.

We recognise the importance of our workforce in achieving high quality professional services and support. Our team continues to be passionate, resilient and dedicated to improving the lives of the people we serve. Change has been a constant over the last year as we have responded to organisational and sector wide challenges, but our team has remained steadfast in their commitment to our clients and community.

We have made significant progress in the strategies and ambitions set out in the 2022-2025 Workforce Plan.

Some achievements of note include:

Attraction and selection

- Development of a Clinical Services Recruitment Strategy to attract talent for hard to fill roles.
- Collaboratively developed an Employee Value Proposition (EVP) with Autism SA staff to identify Autism SA's unique offering as a workplace. Our EVP is now used across all our recruitment promotion.

Targeted learning and development programs

The review of the mandatory training framework and introduction of the Talent Learning Management System provided improved targeted course content and greater transparency of training compliance.

Enhanced leadership strength and talent management

- Partnered with a Registered Training Organisation to offer a Diploma of Leadership and Management for 14 line managers.
- Implemented a Succession Planning Policy. Succession planning is important to ensure we have the right people at the right time in positions which are critical to our success, and prepares high potential employees to qualify for these positions.

Employee Consultative Committee

As a result of the feedback from the 2022 Staff Engagement Survey, nominations were called for employee representatives to join the Employee Consultative Committee. The goal of this committee is to develop two-way communication, bringing together organisation-wide representatives to enable effective and timely communication between employees and management.

Strengthen workforce health and wellbeing

Our Employee Wellbeing Committee commenced, introducing a range of initiatives including an online health and wellbeing hub, social engagement activities, fruit bowls, stretch sessions and more.



A lunchtime stretch session at our Elizabeth office, organised by the Employee Wellbeing Committee.

Autism SA's Employee Value Proposition

When you join Autism SA you'll get to work with dedicated and passionate staff who are driven to support autistic people to live the life they choose in an inclusive society.

Working alongside experienced colleagues from a variety of professions, you'll have access to an extensive knowledge base and development opportunities, giving you the chance to fuel your professional growth, expand your skills, and provide the highest quality of care to clients and their families.

You'll also have access to salary packaging, employee wellbeing initiatives, modern facilities and flexible work arrangements.

Everyday you'll learn something new, you'll be connected to an innovative and like-minded group of people, you'll have access to the latest research and therapies in autism and you'll be a valued member of the Autism SA community.

Workplace Gender Equality Report

In accordance with requirements of the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 (Act), on 1 July 2023 the Autism Association of South Australia lodged its annual compliance report with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency. The aim of gender equality in the workplace is to achieve broadly equal opportunities and outcomes for women and men.

The Autism SA report information is available on the Autism SA website at:

autismsa.org.au/governance/

STAR Awards



STAR Awards MC David Palmer addresses the audience. Top right - Helen Graham and Amy Smith. Bottom right - Monique Palmer and Keira Hewitt.

The annual Staff Team and Recognition (STAR) Awards were held at the Adelaide Zoo in December. Around 180 staff members gathered to celebrate each other and their achievements throughout the year.

18 awards were presented to individuals and teams who had been nominated by their peers, in addition to staff who reached a service milestone being recognised.

The night wouldn't have been possible without the generosity of our sponsors, who each had an award named after their business. We thank them all for their support and making the night the success it was.

Congratulations to all of the STARS who were acknowledged during the awards.

Award	Recipient	Special Commendations
Kate Parker Exemplary Service Award	Samantha Hayward-Brown	Jess Steyn
Beyond Bank Innovation Award	The Social SPOT Team	Dariusz Szczurowski
Efex Workplace Culture Award	Emma Connell	Kylie Roberts
CBB Workplace Excellence Award	Deborah Schonfeldt	Gurbaj Cheema
StreetFleet Bold Brave Brilliant Award	Kristy Walsh	Amy Smith
Expr3ss Team Spirit Award	FSG Redwood Park	CSI Rostering Team
MRS Property Person Centred Award – support to clients	Chloe Haynes	Shaonan Li
CBS Inc. Person Centred Award – support internally	Saloni Shah	Keira Hewitt
Paul Moroney Inclusion Award - champion for others	Corrine Campbell	Kylie Roberts

Service milestones

Thank you to the following staff for your ongoing commitment and dedication to autistic individuals, their families and carers, and Autism SA. You make a world of difference to our community.

5 years

Matthew Smith
Ravindra Jayasinghe Mudalige
Markandeyulu Raju Satyavolu
Gurbaj Cheema
Prasanth Padmanabhan
Amy Smith
Claudia Melino
Ajith Jayantha
Jagjit Singh Sethi
Sanil Shrestha
Leanne Cooper
Leanne Voivenel
Rosemary Brown
Isabella Collins
Lisa Studders
Richard Paul
Andrew Thrift
Shiv Kumar Sivampeta
Shazleen Azeez
Sunny Dev
Bimal Kandel
Caroline Warncken
James Ferguson
Reece Trevenen
Amit Sabherwal

10 years

Stephanie MacSkimming
Sekou Kaba
Sheku Sherrif

15 years

Jessica Steyn
Lauren Giles
Pei-Yin Huang

20 years

Susan Maschmedt

Governance

The Board of Autism SA accepts overall responsibility for the corporate governance of the organisation and is committed to ensuring that the principles of good governance are implemented with integrity.

Autism SA Governance

The Board is required to act in accordance with the objects of the Autism SA Constitution to:

1. Lead performance improvement of Autism SA through strategy formulation, policy development and monitoring management actions; and
2. Ensure compliance of Autism SA and the correct conduct of Directors, both as individuals and collectively, as a Board.

Corporate Governance Statement

The Charter clarifies the responsibilities and boundaries of the Board in setting the strategy and direction of Autism SA and managing and controlling the organisation.

As extracted from Autism SA's Board Charter, 'Autism SA is a Company Limited by Guarantee and operates as a not-for-profit organisation with the status of a public benevolent institution. It is governed by a constitution approved by members.'

The Board delegates the responsibility for the management of the organisation to the Chief Executive Officer. The Board reports to members through the Annual Report, Annual General Meeting and such other meetings as may be called by the Board or the membership.

Membership

Membership of the Company comprises of two classes: Ordinary Members and Associate Members who pay an annual fee.

For further information regarding organisational membership, please refer to the constitution of Autism SA, which is published publicly on the Company website at autismsa.org.au

Composition of the Board

The composition of the Board is determined in accordance with the Autism SA Constitution. The Board is comprised of no less than five and no more than eight Directors. This includes two Client Representative Directors (elected by the Members entitled to vote) and between three and six Directors (including the Managing Director, if any) with the skills and expertise that the Board determines it requires.

The Board has a Board skills matrix and is responsible for succession planning and making Board appointments. Details of Directors' experience and qualifications are included in this document. They are all advocates and champions for the rights of people with a disability.

Board members serve on a voluntary basis, except for out-of-pocket expenses.

Board Committees

The Board has established a number of committees to assist it in carrying out its responsibilities. The Board determines the membership, role, and responsibilities of each committee.

Ethical Standards

Autism SA is committed to maintaining the highest of ethical standards. The organisation follows good practice in governance to ensure integrity and influence. This includes the Board placing great importance on Board members declaring any existing or potential conflict of interest in relation to their duties as Directors.

The organisation has also developed extensive policies and third-party certification against the NDIS Quality and Safeguard Commission and Australian Service Excellence Standards (ASES) as part of its quality assurance and continuous improvement framework. It also ensures it meets its other requirements and obligations to operate and provide services and supports.

Privacy Policy

Autism SA values support from the community and is committed to ensuring the privacy of the personal information that is entrusted to the organisation by responding to the 13 Australian Privacy Principles in the Privacy Act, as amended 2012, dealing with the collection, use, disclosure, and data security of personal information. The respect for privacy forms part of the ongoing trust the organisation wishes to maintain with stakeholders.

Details regarding the Board and Autism SA's financial position are outlined in the audited financial report for the year ended 30 June 2023.

This report can be obtained online from autismsa.org.au

Treasurer's report



Mark Morelli
Treasurer

The operating environment in 2022-23 was extremely challenging. Continuing difficulties brought about by the NDIS, competition within the Supported Independent Living (SIL) sector, skills shortages, the impacts of changes in the business on some clients and the continuing impacts of COVID on our workforce in the first part of the year, all had an impact on our bottom line.

Over the last five years the business has doubled in size. This required an investment in core systems. The cost impacts of these systems, maintaining our workforce and replacing lost SIL clients saw business revenue decline by circa 10% to \$35,850,901 (2022 \$39,426,835) and an operating deficit of \$2,583,747 (2022 \$2,383,585).

Changes to investment values reduced the comprehensive loss to \$1,708,503 (2022 \$2,794,657).

The losses over the last two years have reduced our reserves. Autism SA cannot continue to incur losses. To be financially sustainable we need to return to a 'profit for purpose' over the next two years. To this end we have:

1. Replaced the lost revenue from Supported Independent Living clients through the onboarding of new clients and are actively seeking other suitable clients.
2. Created an intense focus on our labour costs ratio to operating revenue.
3. Planned an extended shutdown period over December and January for clinical services and corporate teams.
4. Reduced overhead costs.
5. Explored options to optimise and reduce the costs of our property requirements.

Our net assets are \$6,305,654 (2022 \$8,014,157).

Throughout these changes we acknowledge the continuing efforts of all our staff and loyal clients.

Table 1: Statement of Profit or Loss and Other Comprehensive Income

	2023 \$m	2022 \$m	\$m Change
Income	35.8	39.4	-3.6
Staff costs	32.2	35.8	-3.6
Other costs	6.2	6.0	0.2
Total Expense	38.4	41.8	-3.4
(Deficit)/Surplus for the year	-2.6	-2.4	-0.2
Other items	0.87	-0.4	-1.27
Total comprehensive (loss)/income	-1.7	-2.8	1.07
Net assets - 1 July	8.0	10.8	-2.8
Net assets - 30 June	6.3	8.0	-1.7

Board of Representatives

Name	Qualifications	Position	Appointments 22/23	Date	Committees	Meetings
Richard Price	<i>B.Sc (Tech) Electronics, GAICD</i>	Board Appointed Director Chair	Re-elected Chair	21/11/2022	Finance Committee*	11 Board meetings + AGM 1 Finance Committee meeting*
Mark Morelli	<i>B. Economics, Grad. Diploma of Accounting, Grad. Diploma of Property, MBA, GAICD, CA</i>	Board Appointed Director Chair of the Finance Committee	Re-elected Chair of Finance Committee	21/11/2022	Finance Committee	9 Board meetings + AGM 9 Finance Committee meetings
Dianne Rogowski		Board Appointed Director	Re-appointed	21/11/2022	Finance Committee	9 Board meetings + AGM 9 Finance Committee meetings
Stuart Matthews	<i>MAICD</i>	Client Representative Director - elected	Re-elected	21/11/2022	Finance Committee	10 Board meetings + AGM 10 Finance Committee meetings
Ann Parker	<i>B. Arts, B. Arts (Hons), PhD, Registered Psychologist</i>		Appointed	17/11/2022		6 Board meetings + AGM
Troy Mohler	<i>B.Com, MBA, GAICD</i>	Client Representative Director - elected	Resigned	21/11/2022	Finance Committee	4 Board meetings + AGM 3 Finance Committee meetings
Heath Colebatch	<i>B. Bus, B. Com</i>	Client Representative Director - elected Board Appointed Director	Resigned	14/11/2022	Finance Committee	3 Board meetings 3 Finance Committee meetings
Matoula Makris	<i>B. Arts, Dip in Languages, B. Law (Hons), LLM</i>	Board Appointed Director	Resigned	30/11/2022	Finance Committee	2 Board meetings 0 Finance Committee meetings
Merrin Nancarrow	<i>Bachelor of Commerce (Accounting) Chartered Accountant</i>	Company Secretary	Resigned	22/08/2022	Finance Committee	1 Board meetings 2 Finance Committee meetings
Helen Graham	<i>B. Psych (Hons)</i>	Company Secretary	Appointed	22/08/2022	Finance Committee	11 Board meetings** + AGM 11 Finance Committee meetings

*Resigned from Finance Committee

**Attendance record is as Company Secretary; additional meetings as CEO.

Life members

Thank you to each and every one of our Life Members for the contributions you have made to Autism SA. We are grateful for your ongoing support, as without it, we would not be where we are today.

- Assoc Prof Verity Bottroff
- Anne Nottage
- Bernard Vaughn
- Betty Jordan OAM
- Cheryl Casey
- David McLean
- Dr Margaret Kyrkou
- Dr Peter Tillett
- Dr Ruth McIntyre
- Jean Bryant
- Jean Cox
- Jenny Karavolos
- John Harley
- John Rosevear
- Joy Johns
- Judith Leeson
- Luke Dale
- Lloyd Cox
- Leigh Hall OAM
- Margaret Wilson
- Mary Angel
- Richard Bruggemann
- Rose Baker
- Roma Aimes
- Ruth Halpin
- Troy Mohler

In Memoriam

- Betty Davis
- Dudley Wilson
- Hilary Johnson AM
- Ken Foggo OAM
- Mae Saun
- Matthew Tiddy OAM
- Nerida Higgins
- Tim Fischer, AC
- Valerie Retallick

To help support the work of Autism SA, please make a tax-deductible donation via our website at autismsa.org.au

Autism SA services and supports:

- Aquatic Therapy
- Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC)
- Autism Friendly Charter (AFC)
- Autistics' Guide to Adulthood
- Community Support
- Day Options
- Diagnosis
- Early Childhood
- Foundation Skills Group
- Groups – early years, school aged children, teens, adolescents, adults
- Infoline
- In-home support
- Mealtime Therapy
- NDIS Planning and Goal Setting
- Positive Behaviour Support
- Psychology and Counselling
- Research
- School Holiday Programs
- School Inclusion
- School Leaver Employment Supports
- School Readiness Program
- Social Work
- Speech Pathology and Occupational Therapy
- Support Coordination
- Supported Independent Living
- The Spectrum
- Training and Consultancy

Contact Us

1300 288 476

autismsa.org.au

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1/57 Elizabeth Way, Elizabeth South Australia

