



2023/24

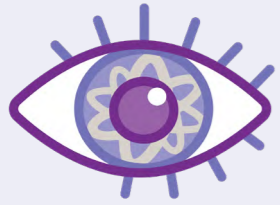
Annual Report

Celebrating

60 *years*



Our Vision, Mission and Values



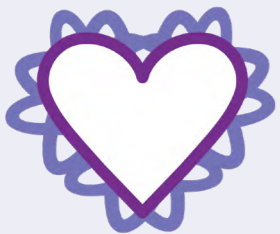
Our Vision

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

Contents

60 years of Autism SA	4
Welcome from our Chair	5
CEO's report	6
Autism SA – our beginnings	8
Advocacy, Research and Projects	10
Major donors and partners	12
Digital reach	14
Autism SA in the community	16
Autism friendly dining takes off in SA	18
Individualised supports and services	20
Make way for Work My Way	22
Our people	24
Champions take the lead	26
STAR Awards	28
Service milestones	29
Governance	30
Treasurer's report	32
Board of Representatives	34
Life members	35



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.

60 years of Autism SA

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

Autism SA is the autism peak body of South Australia. Founded in 1964 by families of autistic children, members were driven by a mission to ensure that the community had access to the best information, education, and support available. As the first organisation of its kind in Australia, we continue to honour the organisation's legacy by advocating for the celebration, appreciation, and understanding of autism, fostering leadership and innovation within the community.

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

Throughout our history, Autism SA has been a beacon of empowerment for the autism and Autistic community. We are at the forefront of advocacy, working with the community to identify needs and pushing for policy changes at local, state, and national levels. Our work extends across various sectors; we drive accessibility and inclusion at events, collaborate with government agencies to shape strategies and policy, and partner with research institutes to ensure that autism research reflects the SA community's experiences and desires.

Our Autism Friendly Charter exemplifies our commitment to inclusion and accessibility, providing free, online training to businesses and organisations. We deliver projects based on the community's wants and needs. We are single-minded on reducing the economic, social, and community participation gap and are focused on enhancing well-being, education, employment, and health outcomes by working with our community.

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

We pride ourselves on a strong values-driven culture that empowers autistic individuals and their allies. Our operations are centred around our unwavering commitment to our clients. Autism SA listens and collaborates with the Autistic community to continuously evolve and tailor our services to meet community needs. We identify service gaps, advocate for change, and promote activities that foster an inclusive society for all.

Our dedicated staff provide comprehensive services and supports across various settings—including clinics, homes, and schools. We work across the lifespan, dedicated to supporting individuals at every stage of life.

Our staff use neuro-affirming practices supporting each individual to thrive.

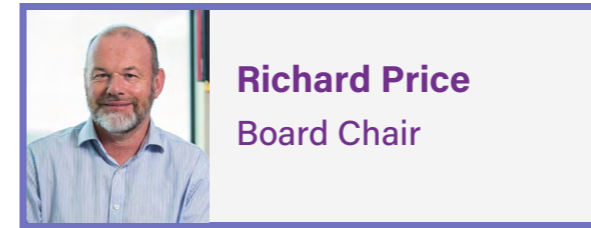
We cultivate a culture of engaged, passionate staff connected to our vision, mission, and values, ensuring high-quality service delivery and positive outcomes for autistic people and their families.

Our commitment to sustainable activities, high standards of service quality, and ethical practice ensures positive, person-centred outcomes. Protecting human rights is central to our decision-making.

Autism SA is an active member of the Autism Education Advisory Group, the Australian Autism Alliance, and a board member of the Australian Advisory Board on Autism, with representation on the NDIA Autism Advisory Board.

Remaining true to our founding principles, Autism SA consistently puts the people we serve at the heart of everything we do, empowering autistic individuals to live the life they choose in an inclusive society.

Welcome from our Chair



Welcome to the Autism SA 2023/24 Annual Report, where we reflect upon the accomplishments and challenges we've faced throughout the financial year.

This year we celebrate a milestone – 60 years of Autism SA.

In 1964 there was a lack of knowledge and awareness around autism in South Australia. In the absence of any support for autistic people and their families, Autism SA was formed by the parents of autistic children to provide support, information, advocacy and advice. 60 years on, while we have evolved and grown, we remain true to our roots, continuing to provide support, information, advocacy and advice backed by our years of experience and knowledge.

Autism SA has evolved considerably over our 60 year history – always adapting and responding to community needs, government policy and the disability sector. This last year has seen the evolution of Autism SA continue as we wound back the scale of our operations in response to the challenging operating environment we exist in. As an organisation that relies heavily on the NDIS, we have found ourselves out of pocket for the cost to provide our NDIS services. The organisation has delivered considerable changes in an effort to reduce overhead costs, but unfortunately we have still found ourselves running at a financial loss. The evolution of Autism SA will continue as we adapt to our environment to ensure our sustainability.

Despite our disappointment with our financial losses, we have much to celebrate in our 60th year, which you will see in the following pages. My personal highlight has been seeing the adoption of inclusive measures across a range of businesses, organisations and schools to include and better support the Autistic community. Not only does this benefit autistic people and their carers, it fosters greater understanding of autism and encourages other organisations to do the same. If we can maintain this momentum just imagine what inclusion and accessibility will look like in 60 years' time!

Autism SA couldn't exist without the support of a diverse and dedicated community. My sincere thanks to my fellow board members, staff, partners, donors and supporters. You help us achieve our vision that each person on the autism spectrum lives the life they choose in an inclusive society.

Thank you to our clients, their families and carers, and the wider Autistic and autism community. Your resilience, experience and guidance inspires our work every day.

CEO's report



Helen Graham
Chief Executive Officer

It has been an honour to lead Autism SA through its' 60th year, and to reflect on how far society has come in terms of understanding autism and the inclusion of Autistic people.

Our Annual Report provides a summary of what the organisation has achieved this financial year, and while we continue to face financial challenges, we have achieved a great deal and made further inroads for inclusion and accessibility in our state. Indeed in 2024, improving inclusion and accessibility for the Autistic community has been a strong theme.

It's been pleasing to see Autism SA widely recognised as a leader in inclusion and accessibility, with a range of organisations actively seeking us out for advice and consultation on their disability, access and inclusion plans and strategies.

Demand for our mobile sensory zone has grown, with more events and venues acknowledging the value of having a safe and welcoming space for autistic individuals to regulate.

This year we embarked on a project to improve inclusion and access in South Australian hotels and clubs. We partnered with the Australian Hotels Association SA Branch to work with pubs to make simple adjustments to improve inclusion, with some venues extending the initiative to sensory menus. The feedback from the Autistic and autism community was incredibly positive, with many sharing they felt valued, comfortable and welcome in venues that took part. It gave them confidence to dine out and participate in an activity they would ordinarily avoid.

This year we have been heartened to see both the state and federal governments creating autism strategies and were grateful to have an opportunity to provide feedback on them. We engaged with autistic individuals, their families and carers to ensure our submissions represented the community we serve. As a member of the Australian Advisory Board on Autism, our advocacy on the National Autism Strategy was elevated by our joint submission with National Disability Services, Australia's peak industry body for disability service organisations.

While there is a considerable effort by the South Australian Government and federal government to improve inclusion and accessibility for the Autistic community, disappointingly the NDIS continues to fall behind. We continue to advocate for our community who are finding themselves challenged by ever constricted NDIS funding.



Helen Graham at the launch of the South Australian Autism Inclusion Charter.

At the heart of everything we do at Autism SA is community and this year the community got behind us and joined in our 60th birthday celebrations. We held a "60 a day for Autism SA" fundraiser during the month of April whereby participants were sponsored to do 60 daily exercises. I enlisted my own family to join me in taking part and we had fun squatting, planking and lunging our way through April while raising funds.

Thank you to everyone who took part in the event, and to those who donated.

In January I received a letter from one of our founding members, Peter Tillett, who notified me of the passing of his beloved wife, Mary Angel, also a founding member of the organisation we know today as Autism SA.

Their son had received an autism diagnosis at age three and they were advised to institutionalise him and move on with their life. Instead, they established The Autistic Children's Association of SA, an organisation where parents could share, learn and advocate to government for support for autistic children. They continued to be fierce advocates for better supports and services for autistic individuals and organised Australia's first national conference on autism, providing a place for autistic individuals, parents, families and professionals to share their ideas, concerns and research.

It is an honor and privilege to hold the position of Chief Executive Officer in an organisation built by such trailblazing people. I am proud to lead a team of people who follow in the footsteps of our founding members in being fierce advocates for autistic people and their families and carers.

I am grateful to those who forged the path before us and I would like to extend my thanks to the Autism SA community, the staff, board members, supporters, donors and partners. It is thanks to you that we continue to see inclusion and access becoming more recognised and embraced by society. I am certain our founding members would also be proud.

I give my whole-hearted gratitude to our clients, their families and the Autistic and autism community.

You steer us toward a more inclusive and accessible society. Thank you for your ongoing support and guidance. It's pleasing to see how far we have come as both an organisation and a society in 60 years. I look forward to seeing inclusion and accessibility become further embedded in South Australia in the years to come.



Team Graham participating in 60 a day for Autism SA fundraiser.

Autism SA – our beginnings



Mary Angel and Peter Tillett on their wedding anniversary.

Mary Angel and Peter Tillett were two of the original founders of Autism SA. Peter notified us that Mary passed away in December 2023. We take this opportunity to commemorate the outstanding contribution she made to the development of services for autistic people and their families in South Australia.

When Autism SA was founded in 1964 little was known about autism.

The founding members were parents of autistic children, including Mary Angel and Peter Tillett, driven by the desire to have access to the best information, education and support.

Peter shares with us what it was like in 1964 when he and Mary discovered their 3-year-old son had autism.

"Because he was one of the first children in this state to carry the label of autism we were very much on our own. There were no services, no professionals to give advice and only a small handful of other parents to relate to."

In fact, autism was so misunderstood that when they received their son's diagnosis, the psychiatrist suggested they *"put him in an institution and proceed to forget that he ever existed"*.

"We were having none of that," says Peter.

Mary then embarked on what became her life's mission to ensure better supports for her son and other autistic people.

In 1964, together with other parents, they formed The Autistic Children's Association of SA – the first organisation of its kind in Australia. They advocated for acceptance and understanding of autism and encouraged research and leadership in the community. Peter was the first secretary and Mary the first assistant secretary.

"Over the next few years, with this nucleus of parents, we worked hard and eventually succeeded in the establishment of a vibrant organisation where parents could come together, share their problems and apply pressure to politicians for special facilities for children with autism."

"It was the beginning of a massive educational awareness program extending to other states and linking with similar bodies overseas."

In the 1980's Mary became the President of the Association, and subsequently the President of the National Association for Autism.

"I stand in awe when I look back at the responsibility she took on, the role she took on," says Peter.

"The public speaking, the officials she met with. I've been reading some of her notes and it was astonishing to read how she negotiated with high level officials from all sorts of organisations."

"Mary always held strongly to the view that the care, support and programs for autistic people should be arrived at through collaboration with professionals and parents...and that shaped a lot of the character of the organisation."

Since its beginnings, Autism SA has been single-minded in its focus on supporting the autism community and has been at the forefront of service development and advocacy, with a history of being responsible for introducing many firsts in South Australia and nationally.

Today, Autism SA prides itself in being the peak body for autism in South Australia, advocating and striving for accessibility and inclusion for the Autistic and autism community. Connection with the community is at the heart of the organisation, ensuring that Autistic people and their parents are heard and valued.

As for Peter and Mary's son, he went on to have his own family, hold a range of jobs and become a talented trombone player. In 1990, Mary was awarded a Membership of The Order of Australia for her dedication and commitment to improving the lives of autistic people.

How grateful we are to Peter, Mary and the other founding members for their courage and commitment to improve the lives of autistic people and their families. We are proud to continue their legacy 60 years on.

Celebrating 60 years



Mary with son Greg, a talented trombone player.



Mary Angel played a critical role in the establishment and growth of Autism SA.

Advocacy, Research and Projects

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

Research Applications

The Autism SA Professional Practice Committee plays a pivotal role in reviewing research applications to ascertain their relevance and potential impact on the Autistic and autism community in South Australia.

Research Projects


We have partnered with research institutes to explore:


- Conscious Sedation Pathways**
 To pilot a conscious sedation pathway for children and adults with intellectual or developmental disability to access health care interventions previously unable to be completed due to distress associated with procedures. Including blood tests, immunisations, examinations, and administration of medication. (Nov 2023 - Jan 2026, SALHN Research Enquiry Grant. Partner with SA Health)
- The Use of Off-the-Shelf Game, Minecraft™ to Promote Social Collaboration Skills in Autistic Pre-Teens: A Trial Study**
 Following on from a pilot, Autism SA in partnership with Adelaide University are conducting a trial study, further exploring the use of Minecraft®, to promote social collaboration skills in pre-teens (aged 10-12) on the autism spectrum.

This resulted in the resource [The Minecraft™ Project: Facilitators and Families Edition](#) to continue to help families practice their skills and maintain friendships the players developed throughout the Minecraft™ project.

- Can LEGO® Robotics Therapy Improve the Mental Health and Social Skills of Adolescents on the Autism Spectrum? A Phase 1 Trial**
 Development and implementation of a LEGO® Robotics Group intervention based on LEGO®-Based Therapy for adolescents on the autism spectrum, exploring mental health, communication, and social gains.

The LEGO® Robotics Guide: A guide to facilitating LEGO® Robotics sessions for autistic teens was developed from this project to guide others on how to form and facilitate the group. Available on the [Autism SA website](#). (2019 - June 2024, Flinders University, Griffith University)
- Intervention for Autistic Children with Behaviours of Concern: Virtual Reality-Based Therapy**
 Autism SA and Flinders University are committed to enhancing industry-academic collaboration for innovation and facilitating the development of the future research workforce. (Sep 2023 - Dec 2025, Flinders University)


 **2** Research applications were reviewed & endorsed


 **4** Research projects were progressed this year

Projects

In 2023/2024 Autism SA have progressed the following projects:

- Autistics' Guide to Adulthood**
 A personal growth learning management system of modules specifically designed and developed by adults on the spectrum and experienced professionals, for the benefit of autistic adults. (2019 - June 2025, Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Grants)
- Building Employer Confidence**
 A national, co-designed, digital resources to build the confidence and ability of employers to recruit, support and retain neurodivergent employees. (Nov 2022 - June 2025, ILC Grants)
- Australian Hotels Association SA - Pubs with Heart**
 Working across SA, the project increased accessibility and inclusion across the hospitality sector by supporting venues to create more neurodivergent-friendly spaces, run accessible events, use neuro-affirming practices, and create inclusive workplaces. (Aug 2023 - Aug 2024, AHA SA Grant)

 **2** National projects were progressed this year

 **1** State project was progressed this year

Advocacy

To ensure the SA autism community's experiences, opinions and recommendations influence state and national policy makers, we made submissions on:

- The South Australian Autism Strategy
- The National Autism Strategy
- Autism CRC - National Framework for Assessing Children's Functional Strengths and Support Needs
- Supporting Students and Young People in WA
- University of South Australia Centre for Research in Education and Social Inclusion - School Exclusions Study

Autism SA provided a submission for the first South Australian Autism Strategy.



Laura Craig, Creative Marketing Coordinator and Ashish Negi, Digital Marketing Project Officer at our sensory zone at the launch of the SA Autism Strategy.

Major donors and partners

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.

Thank you for your donations throughout the year. Your support is vital to our success and ultimately provides better outcomes for our clients and the Autistic community.

Our partnership with Eflex

We would like to thank our long-standing partner Eflex who this year have donated office space to support our corporate services staff for two years. With this move, Autism SA's corporate services staff are now located in Adelaide's CBD.



Eflex Enterprise Account Manager Gino Mignone, the winner of Autism SA's Workplace Innovation Award, Recruitment Business Partner Gilda Galves and Autism Engagement Advisor Taylor Bayly at the Autism SA STAR awards.

Major donors and partners include:

- Eflex
- Baiada Children's Charity Nest
- MRS Property
- Marinis Financial Group
- Adelaide Fringe
- Telstra
- Variety Children's Charity SA
- CBB - Community Business Bureau
- StreetFleet
- Expr3ss
- Community Bridging Services (CBS) Inc.
- Lightsview Fitness Factory Health Clubs
- 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.

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 for training volunteers.



Senior Speech Pathologist Emily McVeigh running Autism Awareness training for Adelaide Fringe Volunteers.

Digital reach

We saw growth across our digital platforms, with people seeking reliable information about autism, supports, and connection with the wider Autistic and autism community. We focused on driving content through social media platforms which was received positively and resulted in increased engagement and followers.



The Spectrum

A trusted source for parents and autistic individuals

In 2019 we launched the Spectrum website to provide parents and autistic individuals with high quality, accessible, credible information and links to support services.

While initially aimed at an Australian audience, a significant portion of the site's visitors come from abroad, underscoring the global demand for reliable information and support.

2 million

visitors since the site was launched in 2019

718,558

visitors to the website during the year, 215,872 of those from Australia.

Niki Welz, Autism SA Research, Project and Resources Creative expressed pride in the website's global impact.

"This shows there is a thirst for reliable, credible information about autism, not just from Australians but the world. It's a privilege for Autism SA to be able to provide that information and empower people to make informed decisions that impact their lives. - Niki Welz"



Autism Friendly Char-

8,074

visitors to the website up 23% from the year before

291

people completed the course during the year.



Autistics' Guide to Adulthood

20,121

visitors to the website this year

3,213

people enrolled learning modules.



Autism SA

550,083

visitors to the website during the year.



Facebook

16,800+

followers

26,800+

page visitors during the year, a 55% increase from the year before.



Instagram

3,400+

followers, a 13% increase since last year

31,900+

page visitors during the year, a 55% increase from the year before.



Linked In

4,100+

followers, a 19% increase since last year

Autism SA in the community



Senior Occupational Therapist Amy Smith with Behaviour Practitioner, Amelia Delic and two of the event drivers at the Adelaide VAILO 500 Autism SA Sensory Zone.

Bringing our Sensory Zone to South Australian community events

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

We were proud to bring our mobile sensory zone to many community events throughout the year and thrilled to see more events seeking to improve inclusion and accessibility to ensure everyone feels welcome. Donations from our generous supporters were crucial in funding our sensory zones throughout the year to ensure they were provided at no charge to these iconic Adelaide events in line with our vision for making South Australia the most inclusive state. In addition, through our partnership with the Adelaide Fringe, we provided 3 sensory zones to Fringe events throughout the year.

Our sensory zones were well received by members of the community. We were proud to provide a safe space for people to regulate. Without sensory zones many attendees across these events would have been unable to attend the event at all or in their entirety.



Left to right: Our sensory zone at the Adelaide Zoo during the launch of Australia's First Autism Strategy. Senior Occupational Therapist, Amy Smith and Behaviour Practitioner, Amelia Delic inside the sensory zone at the VAILO 500.

We attended several events this year with our sensory zone including:

- The National Pharmacies Christmas Pageant
- SA's Metropolitan Fire Station Open Day
- The VAILO 500
- The Lumary City-Bay Fun Run
- Touch a Truck
- Launch of South Australia's First Autism Strategy

Communication Boards

This year our speech pathologists Emily McVeigh and Emma O'Connel developed two communication boards with the Adelaide Zoo and The Royal Adelaide Show. These boards were created to be specifically relevant to their location. Since their installation have been praised by the autism community. These boards increase the broader accessibility of these Adelaide institutions. Both the Adelaide Zoo and the Royal Adelaide Show have also introduced relaxed or quiet hours at their venues.



The Honourable Emily Bourke MLC; Assistant Minister to the Premier of South Australia; Assistant Minister for Autism and Adelaide Zoo staff member at the launch of the communication board developed by Autism SA's Speech Pathologists for Adelaide Zoo.



Creative Marketing Coordinator, Laura Craig at our sensory zone at the Lumary City-Bay.



The Autism SA team at City-Bay in 2006.

Autism friendly dining takes off in SA



Autism SA's Autism Liaison Officer, Kaitlin Withers and CEO Helen Graham with Hurley Hotel Group Publican Anna Hurley.

Autism SA has a history of firsts. It was the first organisation of its kind in Australia, hosted the first National Conference on Autism in 1967, opened the first autism-specific school in South Australia in 1974 and developed and launched Australia's first Autism Friendly Charter in 2016, to name a few.

In 2023 we added another first, rolling out a project to improve inclusion and accessibility in venues across SA.

In an exciting collaboration between Autism SA and the Australian Hotels Association: SA (AHA|SA), we were funded through the AHA|SA's Pubs with Heart program to appoint a dedicated Autism Liaison Officer. The Liaison Officer worked closely with AHA|SA members, empowering them to better support autistic patrons and employees.



of autistic people and their families avoid going to venues like pubs and bars.¹

Scan or select the QR to view our guide to enhancing access and inclusion in venues.



1. Australian Catholic University. (2020) 'Summary of results from consultation survey, to inform a submission into the Federal Senate Select Committee on Autism'.

Our goal was to create more inclusive and welcoming venues in SA, to benefit autistic people, their families and the wider community.

Through consultation with the Autistic and autism community, the Autism Liaison Officer determined what venues could do to make dining more accessible for autistic people and their families.

The first venue to come on board was The Hurley Group's Arkaba Hotel. They introduced a monthly Quiet Dinner, by adapting one of their break-out function rooms to have dimmed lighting, reduced sound and no TV. There was also a private bar for food and drink orders, allowing guests to order without having to navigate the busy main dining area. The initiative was applauded by the Autistic community and received significant media attention and discussion online.

The Arkaba's first Quiet Dinner set the standard and encouraged other venues to take part.

After that another 20 venues made adaptations to be more inclusive, many opting to offer Quiet Dinners. The Marion Hotel trialled a Quiet Quiz night. The Brompton Hotel had Quiet Dinners paired with a simplified menu and a sensory space, while the Oak and Iron Tavern introduced a sensory-friendly menu, which was again applauded by the Autistic community.

Venues also made access guides available on their website so guests could plan ahead and know what to expect.

Some venues underwent staff training to up-skill their teams on understanding autism and better supporting autistic guests.

The 12-month project created a shift in thinking about inclusion in SA venues. It proved that simple adjustments could make a huge difference for the Autistic and autism community, as well as benefit venues by attracting new clientele.

To ensure the momentum gained from the project continues, a comprehensive guide has been created to assist other venues to be more inclusive.



Anna Hurley and Kaitlin Withers at the Arkaba's first quiet dinner.



Sensory inclusive menu options on divided plates at the Oak & Iron Hotel in Mount Barker.



Photo of attendees at the Marion Hotel's quiet quiz night.

Individualised supports and services

Individualised services continue to be a core component of the supports Autism SA provides to the autistic community.



Occupational Therapy Speech Pathology

Speech Pathology and Occupational Therapy

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



Support Coordination

Support Coordination

Support Coordination assists individuals and their families to access both NDIS and mainstream services specific to their needs, ensuring capacity to manage their support needs are built along the way.



Community Support and Inclusion Home, Living and Lifestyle

Community Support and Inclusion and 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.



School Readiness Program

Specialised Support NDIS Autism Inclusion Practitioner

Foundation Skills

Support for learning

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

We also run services in schools that have the shared aim of keeping autistic students engaged in their schooling, ensuring they feel supported and valued through our support for both educators and students.



Behaviour Support

Psychology and Counseling

Social Work

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

With increase 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.



Department of Education - School Inclusion Program

School Inclusion Program

Autism SA provides capacity building support to schools to ensure autistic students gain access to education successfully and support needs which arise in school environments.



Make way for Work My Way



Work My Way participant Nicole at Blackwood Library.

Work My Way program empowers Nicole to pursue career goals.

When Autism SA began 60 years ago, it was the The Autistic Children's Association of SA. As time went on the organisation evolved to support adults too. Today, we offer a range of services for people of all ages.

Our Work My Way program is aimed specifically at young autistic adults and equips them with skills and experience to pursue their career goals.

Nicole is one of the participants and through her involvement with the program has secured volunteer roles at a library and an op shop.

Nicole thoroughly enjoys working at the library as her love of books and the quiet atmosphere of the library complements her sensory needs, allowing her to excel in her role.

"Being surrounded by books constantly, I'd say that's one of my favourite bits. I've always loved reading books, they're wonderful," Nicole says.

Volunteering at the op shop has further opened up Nicole's world to new friendships.

"I've actually made some very good friends there which has been really nice. I enjoy coming in to see the people I work with, sometimes more than I enjoy going there to do the work, which is not something I have really experienced before."

Only 38% of Australians on the spectrum participate in the workforce, compared to 83% of Australians without a disability.

Our Work My Way program tackles the issue of high unemployment rates for autistic people by mentoring young autistic adults and building their skills, experience and confidence by supporting them to find and maintain work experience in areas of their interest, with the aim of securing paid employment.

The opportunity to volunteer in the two roles has allowed Nicole to hone her skills and preferences for a job.

"I'd love to work within the library system...It works really well to my strengths. Works really well for my sensory sensitivities."

"I would actually be able to learn and thrive in the environment because of how it's set up. And being able to work around books all day is wonderful."

Reflecting on her journey with the Work My Way program, Nicole values the support she's received and the opportunities for personal growth, particularly building social skills and forming connections with other Work My Way participants.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in the Work My Way Program at Autism SA. They have helped me find a career path and set me on track to achieve my goals."

"In 2024, I am studying the Certificate IV in Library and Information Services part time at TAFE SA, which I was supported to get into through Work My Way."



Work My Way participant Nicole at Blackwood Library.

Our people



Autism SA team member Sue Maschmedt, Senior Autism Engagement Advisor. Top right - (left to right) Sarah Schumann, Business Unit Lead (School Services), Jamie Rossiter, Marketing and Communications Volunteer, Maddison Cocks, Business Operations Manager (Clinical Services), Victoria Brown, Business Unit Lead (Therapy Services) and Laura Craig, Marketing and Communications Coordinator. Bottom right - Tae-Young Lee, Behaviour Practitioner.

Sue Maschmedt is a Senior Autism Engagement Advisor and has been working at Autism SA since 2003. Here she reflects on how support and inclusion of autistic people has changed in that time.

There has been such change in autism awareness over the years which is truly a beautiful thing!

Autism has always been on the rise and there are now so many proud people who say "I'm autistic" or "My son/daughter/nephew/niece has autism" without feeling isolated or alone.

I feel so privileged to have seen the progression over the past 21 years from working with Autism SA. Through our ongoing commitment to really listen to the Autistic community about how we can all learn to be more inclusive, we educate others to celebrate autism. It is so wonderful to see neuro-affirming practices becoming more understood. It reinforces that we all learn differently, we all need certain things to learn and to feel connected, comfortable and included in our world together.

Autism is becoming so much more understood in the community, especially with businesses now looking at 'how can we be more inclusive?' There have been some great initiatives implemented over the years to include things like 'quiet hour' in

shopping centers, sensory friendly eating places whereby lights are dimmed and noise levels kept to a minimum, and autism friendly places to get haircuts. We're also seeing sensory rooms on the rise across schools and sensory gardens etc.

Education and awareness is allowing people to be who they are and to embrace diversity.

Autism SA has had a significant impact on changing people's perceptions to not 'fear' autism. Instead we celebrate people by always looking at strengths and abilities. We use evidence-based strategies, change the way we communicate, support sensory and environmental aspects and look at the whole person.

One thing that hasn't changed in my 21 years is that Autism SA staff have always been so passionate. They will always be standing side-by-side with the Autistic community and continue to advocate for South Australia to be a place where we are all the same, yet all so beautifully different – and to embrace that!

- Sue Maschmedt

Strengthen workforce unity, morale and wellbeing

Our Employee Wellbeing Committee held lots of great events throughout the year. These events included a staff paint and sip, quiz night and fancy-dress days. The events were well received by the Autism SA team with many getting involved in various activities throughout the year.



Autism SA staff with their finished paintings at the staff paint and sip held 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 31 May 2024 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/

Champions take the lead



Marketing and Communications Volunteer Jamie Rossiter - the face of our 60 a day for Autism SA fitness fundraiser.

“*Together we have raised thousands for autistic people and their families. Thank you. - Jamie Rossiter*”

The community really put the fun into fundraising for our 60th Anniversary celebrations.

60 a day for Autism SA

Our 60 a day for Autism SA community fundraiser invited people to commit to doing 60 daily squats, lunges, push-ups, crunches or an exercise of their choice for the month of April and invite their networks to sponsor them. We had over 40 people sign up, and with the support of 144 donors they raised \$9008.

It was great to see the commitment and perseverance of participants as the month went on. Special mention to long time Autism SA volunteer Jamie Rossiter, who was not only the ambassador for the campaign, but also raised over \$500.

We were also supported by Team Telstra, a team of 3 people who raised an impressive \$3,635. This also resulted in an Autism Month event at Telstra's state office attended by around 50 Telstra staff as well as Assistant Minister for Autism, the Honourable Emily Bourke and the former Director of the Office for Autism Emma Goodall. Our CEO Helen Graham along with Autism Inclusion Officer Kaitlin Withers and Community Engagement and Branding Officer Hannah Badenhop were guest speakers at the event, providing an opportunity to reach a new audience and further promote inclusion.

Fitness Factory 4x48 hour challenge

In theme with our fitness challenge, we were contacted by Illy, a gym member at Fitness Factory Lightsview, with a request to support him in a fundraising challenge he had organised at the gym. He had committed to completing an intense workout every 4 hours over 48 hours during a weekend in May. His inspiration was his autistic daughter.

The gym community got behind him in a huge way, with 12 members doing the complete 48 hour challenge, while others joined in some of the workouts over the weekend.

Together the Fitness Factory gym community raised an incredible \$14,000 for Autism SA.



Autism SA CEO Helen Graham and Marketing and Communications Manager Katie Isaac receiving a cheque from Fitness Factory after their 4x48 hour fitness challenge.



Telstra's General Manager – State Government (SA/NT) Rob Frost presenting Autism SA a cheque for the 60 a day for Autism SA fundraiser. Members of the Telstra team participated and raised more than \$3000 collectively.



The Disability, Ageing and Lifestyle Expo in 2001.

STAR Awards



The Autism SA team enjoying the STAR Awards.

Our annual Staff Team and Recognition (STAR) Awards were held at The Arkaba, which was fitting as they went on to be the first venue to offer Quiet Dinners as part of our project to make South Australia’s pubs and restaurants more autism friendly. The Arkaba proved to be a fabulous location for the STAR Awards, hosting 130 of our staff and sponsors in December 2023 for a night of celebration and reflection as the year came to an end.

18 awards were presented to individuals and teams who had been nominated by their peers.

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

Award	Recipient	Special Commendations
Person Centered - Internal Award	Clancy van Aalst	Shannon Ellis
Person Centered - External Award	Kaylene Haythorpe	Hirak Sapara
Brave, Bold and Brilliant Award	Michael Riddle	Debra Heays
Team Spirit Award	School NDIS Team	Klemzig Team
Workplace Culture Award	David Peterkin	Gilda Galvez
Innovation Award	Dariusz Szczurowski	Lucy Bye
Workplace Excellence Award	Matthew Macbeth	Stephanie Decelles
Paul Moroney Inclusion Award - Chamption for Others	Hannah Badenhop	Amy Smith
Kate Parker Exemplary Service Award	Corrine Campbell	David Palmer

STAR Awards sponsors

A huge thank you to our event sponsors. Without their generous support we would not be able to recognise our staff in this way.

- Community Business Bureau
- Community Bridging Services
- Efex
- Telstra
- Wallmans Lawyers
- Baiada
- Lumary

Service milestones

5 years

- Dariusz Szczurowski
- Sarah Fraser
- Indraj Singh
- Mandeep Singh
- Tony Davis
- Pushpesh Bishnoi
- Mahesh Gautam
- Michael Nketiah Boakye
- Sonja Rusmir
- David Peterkin
- Melinda Alley
- Satender Kaur
- Daljeet Singh
- Gert Goesaert
- Chewan Adhikari
- Jason Mason
- Maria Pinzon Cobos
- Emily Sykes
- Lawrence Gbeleyee
- Olivier Nzosaba
- Khalifa Sanoe
- Harman Sethi

10 years

- Jamie Rossiter (volunteer)
- Echezona Iluno
- Kerwin Seamus Rosal
- Shaonan Li

15 years

- Niki Welz

20 years

- Michael Scicluna
- Gus Venables

25 years

- Greg Healy

30 years

- Amanda Harris

Thank you to our team members who have demonstrated ongoing commitment and dedication to autistic individuals, their families and carers through your long-service.

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 2024.

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



Top to bottom: Autism SA staff with a client at the Fisher Street School opening in 1975 (photo courtesy of The Advertiser).

Autism SA staff with clients participating in the School Holiday Program's Social Engagement Group.

Treasurer's report



Autism SA is up against a challenging operating environment. Despite our best efforts, we disappointingly faced another year of financial losses.

I want to acknowledge the significant efforts made by the team to mitigate the impact of this, and to position us for recovery.

- 1. Restructures to reduce overhead costs**
While it is never our preference to make staff members redundant, it was a critical measure this year to reduce our overheads.
- 2. CRM Implementation**
A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system was introduced to enhance how we manage customer data. This has improved our billing processes and allowed us to better understand and serve our clients.
- 3. Withdrawal from services that we self-funded**
We made the difficult decision to cease operating our Infoline and Newly Diagnosed Support services.
- 4. Subleasing and rent-free office space**
We secured rent-free office space for two years in the city for our corporate services team. This is thanks to the invaluable partnership with our IT provider, Efex.
- 5. Improved booking and vacancy management**
Refining the booking processes for therapy services has reduced the number of vacancies, increasing our service provision to our clients

- 6. Extended Christmas and New Year break**
We responded to the reduced demands of the market and extended the leave break to reduce staffing and operational costs during this typically quiet period.
- 7. Closure of the Foundation Skills Group**
We made the difficult decision to close this valued service at Netley. The reduction to NDIS packages resulted in fewer clients receiving sufficient funding to attend FSG. Consequently, we were unable to attract enough clients to cover the costs to provide the service.

It is worth noting that some of these measures took place late in the financial year, so the benefits won't be realised until the 2024/25 financial year.

Despite these initiatives, losses have continued largely due to external factors. The pricing limitations set by the NDIS do not match what it costs us to provide our services given rising operating costs. This situation has been compounded by increased competition, particularly from unregistered providers.

As a result Autism SA reported a loss of \$3.58m.

The numbers are sobering, but we remain steadfast in our resolve to return the organisation to a sustainable financial position.

I'd like to thank our staff and clients for their ongoing loyalty and support of Autism SA.

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

	2024 \$m	2023 \$m	\$m Change	% Change
Income	31.4	35.8	-4.4	-12%
Staff costs	28.3	32.2	3.9	-12%
Other costs	6.4	6.2	0.2	3%
Total Expense	34.7	38.4	-3.7	-10%
(Deficit)/Surplus for the year	-3.3	-2.6	-0.7	-27%
Other items	-0.28	0.87	-1.15	-132%
Total comprehensive (loss)/income	-3.58	-1.7	-1.88	-67%
Net assets - 1 July	6.3	8.0	-1.7	-21%
Net assets - 30 June	2.7	6.3	-3.6	-57%

Board of Representatives

Name	Qualifications	Position	Appointments 23/24	Date	Committees	Meetings
Richard Price	<i>B.Sc (Tech) Electronics, GAICD</i>	Board Appointed Director Chair	Re-elected Chair	20/11/2023		15 Board meetings + AGM 7 Finance Committee meetings*
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	Resigned	19/04/2024	Finance Committee	11 Board meetings + AGM 9 Finance Committee meetings
Dianne Rogowski		Board Appointed Director		21/11/2022	Finance Committee	11 Board meetings + AGM 9 Finance Committee meetings
Stuart Matthews	<i>MAICD</i>	Client Representative Director - elected	Appointed Acting Chair of Finance Committee	20/04/2024	Finance Committee	14 Board meetings + AGM 11 Finance Committee meetings
Dr. Ann Parker	<i>B. Arts, B. Arts (Hons), PhD, Registered Psychologist</i>	Board Appointed Director		17/11/2022		15 Board meetings + AGM
Dr. Gillian Hood	<i>MB, ChB, DA, FRCA, FANZCA, Dip Clin Hyp</i>	Client Representative Director - elected	Appointed	22/05/2024		3 Board meetings + AGM
Helen Graham	<i>B. Psych (Hons)</i>	Company Secretary	Re-appointed	21/11/2023	Finance Committee	15 Board meetings + AGM 12 Finance Committee meetings

*Meetings attended as an Observer

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
- 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
- Mary Angel



Left to right: Autism SA's regional program in 1986. Autism SA client in 1988.

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

Contact Us

1300 288 476

autismsa.org.au

6-8 MAB Circuit, Tonsley South Australia

1/57 Elizabeth Way, Elizabeth South Australia



Celebrating 60 *years*



A group session at Autism SA in 1985.

