

[amaze.org.au](http://amaze.org.au)

# Annual Review 2017-18

# A message from the Chair

It is an enormous privilege to be the Chair of the Board of Amaze and I have been greatly inspired this year by the skill and dedication of our staff, our board members and active autism community network. My association with Amaze, and previously with Autism Victoria, goes back many years, but I cannot remember a time when our community has had such a clear focus and been able to work together so effectively.

This year's considerable output is underpinned by a focussed and transparent strategic plan, endorsed by the Board in December 2017, which contains 20 new performance measures to track our progress and achievements towards our 25 year social impact aspiration. This ambitious plan sets a roadmap for Amaze to create generational change needed to make Australia truly inclusive for autistic people.

Our ground breaking *Community Attitudes* research revealed 98% of Australians have heard of autism – the time of awareness raising is well and truly over; Amaze has now turned our focus to building understanding, engagement and acceptance to address the inequality and barriers to participation experienced by autistic people every day.

Through our information and education programs, through the expansion of autism friendly events and activities across our state, and by using our strong voice to advocate to governments of all persuasions, we are seeing significant positive change in the way autism is viewed and understood.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank departing Amaze Chair Shannon Eeles and other board members Sandra Jones, Vic Rajah and Ryan Brown for their dedication and passion. I also welcome new member, Jason Coonan – and the continued involvement of Nicole Rinehart, who was re-elected to the Board this year.

Amaze is more committed than ever to placing autistic people and their families and the centre of our work. I know that when we listen to and work with our community, the future will indeed be amazing.



Judy M Brewer AO



# A message from the CEO

Since joining Amaze in 2014, one of my main priorities was to conduct research to determine what the wider community understood about autism. If we are to change attitudes and behaviours and increase understanding, we need to know where to start and be able to measure our progress. In May 2018, Amaze released data from its *Community Attitudes and Experiences* research studies; this Australia-first research revealed that 85% of Australians have personal contact with an autistic person, but that their understanding of how to support autistic people was limited. The extent of discrimination, stigma and inappropriate behaviour towards autistic people and their families was stark – 52% stated they felt socially isolated and 4 in 10 often didn't leave their home. The research generated a huge level of media coverage, with autistic advocate Prue Stevenson appearing in television news and the research being reported on in newspapers and on TV and radio nationally.

Amaze was actively advocating to influence government in many ways – most significantly through supporting the Victorian Autism Plan Advisory Group to develop the state plan, and being invited by the Federal Minister for Social Services to join the NDIS Autism Advisory Group. Both these groups provide opportunities to prosecute the priorities of our community and present evidence-based solutions. As the country faces elections in both Victoria and federally in the coming months, Amaze will be actively pushing governments to make commitments to act for autism.

Amaze is dedicated to its principle of placing autistic people and their families at the centre of everything we do. This involves extensive consultation on all areas of our work and appearing in the media for Amaze – but we are also proactively working to increase autistic staff representation; within our small workforce of 25 people, many staff have autistic family members, but in this last financial year I have been thrilled to welcome three autistic people to the Amaze team.

There is much work to be done to build community understanding, engagement and acceptance of autism and autistic people. Our quest is long and our vision is ambitious, but together we will achieve incredible things for autistic people and their families.



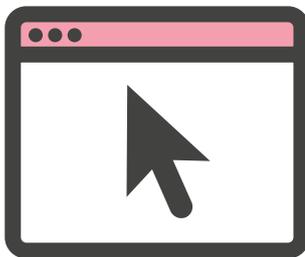
Fiona Sharkie  
Amaze CEO



# Our year in numbers

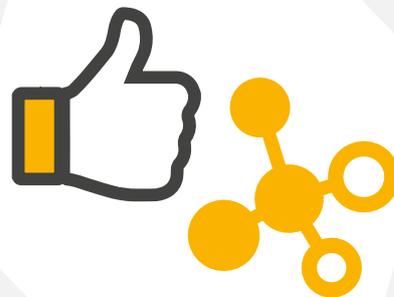
**160k**

visitors to the Amaze  
website



**22,600**

in our social media  
community



**4,863**

requests to the  
Autism Information  
Advisor (AIA) service



**96%**

of callers would  
recommend the AIA  
service to a friend



**60**

free and paid forums  
and workshops  
- up from 56 last year



**52**

Early Days workshops  
for 451 parents and  
carers of young  
autistic children

**2,050**

people attended Amaze  
workshops and forums  
- up 69% from 2016-17



**18,000**

eSpectrum  
subscribers



**2.9m**

Spectrospective  
campaign impressions



# Outcome 1

## Community understanding of autism in Victoria increases over time

### Community Attitudes and Do One Thing for Autism

In May 2018, Amaze released new research, *Community Attitudes & Behaviours towards Autism and Experiences of Autistic People and their Families*. The groundbreaking research revealed 98% of Australians have heard of autism and 85% of people have contact with an autistic person. Despite this widespread awareness and connection, only 29% of respondents said they know how to support an autistic person. And when researchers asked the same question of autistic people, only 4% believed people in the community knew how to support them.

In response to these alarming findings, Amaze launched *Do One Thing for Autism*, a campaign encouraging the community to pledge to do one simple thing to make the world a little bit easier for autistic people everywhere. In May and June 2018, the *Do One Thing* website was visited by 3,146 people.



### Spectroscopic

In 2018, with funding from the Department of Education and Training, *Spectroscopic* centred on education. With contributions from 35 people the film draws on lived experiences of autistic people to build understanding of how community members can support autistic students in and out of the classroom.

We once again partnered with Village Roadshow, screening *Spectroscopic* at 16 cinemas in Victoria and Tasmania on World Autism Awareness Day, with 2,050 people attending the screenings. Val Morgan provided \$15,000 pro-bono advertising to show a *Spectroscopic* trailer to more than 16,000 cinema-goers. Through a social media campaign, generously funded by 5point Foundation, we achieved 2.9 million impressions of *Spectroscopic* content and 1,000 views of the film online.

Evaluation surveys demonstrated *Spectroscopic's* strong impact on the community: the campaign scored 7.8/10 on helping viewers understand the needs of autistic students, and 7.6/10 for showing them ways they could support autistic students.



## Media coverage

In 2017-18, Amaze continued to work with the media to build their understanding of autism, and capacity to report on autism respectfully and positively.

A significant highlight was the release of the *Community Attitudes* research and the *Do One Thing for Autism* campaign. A rigorous media campaign generated huge interest in the story; we reached more than 3.6 million people through 341 media stories on the research and resulting campaign, with national coverage including The Australian, Herald Sun, ABC News Breakfast and Radio National.

Amaze engaged with the media throughout the year, providing expert commentary as Victoria's peak body and connecting media with the autism community to ensure autistic voices were heard in the news. Amaze and our community were sought for comment on a range of issues, including Don Burke (The Herald Sun, Perth Now, New Daily); Northland Shopping Centre's sensory-friendly initiatives (The Age and ABC); the violent attack on an autistic student in Melbourne (3AW and The Australian); and *Spectroscopic* (Herald Sun).

## Autism Public Education Campaign

With the *Community Attitudes* research revealing a dire need for greater public education on autism, Amaze secured funding from the Victorian Government to develop a campaign to build understanding of how to support autistic people in the community. Amaze – in consultation with the autism community as well as Yellow Ladybugs, Asperger's Victoria, I CAN Network, Autism Family Support Association, and Autism Intersections – will develop and test campaign concepts, and produce the campaign in late 2018.



# Outcome 2

## Attitudes and behaviour towards autistic people by the Victorian community improves over time

### The 101 Campaign

Following the Parliamentary Inquiry into Autism report being tabled in May 2017, the Victorian autism community joined together for the first time to advocate to the State Government to commit to the recommendations made in the report.

The *I am for the 101* campaign – developed by Amaze and supported by the I-Can Network, Asperger's Victoria, Autism Family Support Association, Yellow Ladybugs and the Olga Tennyson Research Centre at LaTrobe University – asked our community to sign a petition to Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews, urging him to accept all 101 recommendations from the Inquiry report.

The petition was signed by 5,000 members of the Victorian autism community and made a significant impact in the Government's response to the Inquiry.



### Initial government response to the Autism Inquiry and development of autism state plan

In December 2017, the Victorian Government responded to the Parliamentary Inquiry by committing \$22 million for immediate actions, and the development of a comprehensive five year Victorian Autism Plan.

Amaze was encouraged by the initial funding commitment, which included key initiatives such as developing a public education campaign, a comprehensive education strategy for autistic students, a best practice model for autism peer-support and support to the other autism organisations.

Amaze worked with the government on the established Victorian Autism Plan Advisory Group to develop the Victorian Autism Plan for the remainder of 2017/18, including facilitating several focus groups for autistic people with complex needs and participating in numerous consultation forums to provide ideas and suggestions for the development of the Plan.

## Amaze's NDIS Advocacy

Autism continues to be the largest diagnostic group within the National Disability Insurance Scheme, with 29% of all participants identifying as autistic. Amaze has been strongly advocating for improvements to the NDIS to ensure autistic people are getting the services and supports they need.

In May 2018 following an error made by the NDIS to alter the eligibility requirements for autism, Amaze made the strong case that the NDIS needs to better engage with the autism community. In response, the Minister responsible for NDIS at the time, The Hon. Dan Tehan MP, announced the establishment of an Autism Advisory Group, consisting of Amaze, the Co-operative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC), Autistic Self-Advocacy Network - Australia and New Zealand (ASAN), Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorder (AABASD) and the Australian Autism Alliance.

## Amaze position papers

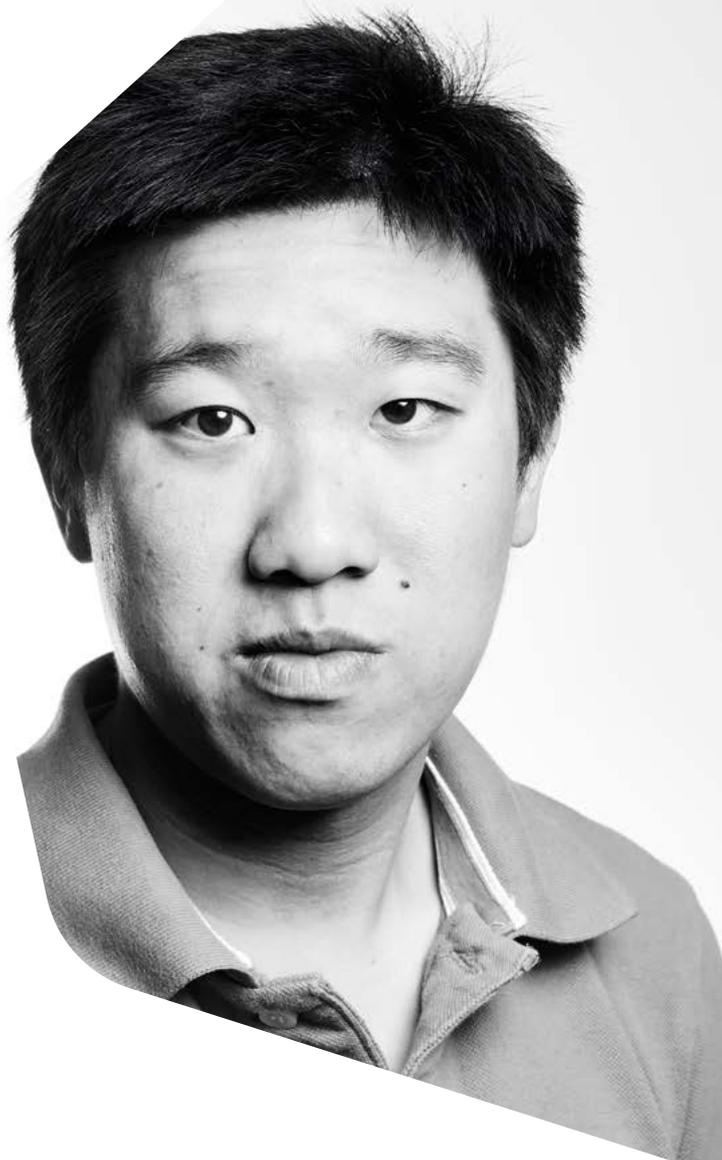
In December 2017 the Amaze Board approved a suite of evidence-based position papers developed in collaboration with the autism community which outline Amaze's position on key issues including: assessment and diagnosis; education; NDIS; employment; mental health; autistic women and girls; and restrictive interventions.

You can read the position papers at [www.amaze.org.au/about-us/policy/position-statement](http://www.amaze.org.au/about-us/policy/position-statement)

## Other submissions and inquiries

Amaze developed submissions into the following Inquiries:

Submission	Recommendations made by Amaze	Adopted
Productivity Commission's NDIS Costs	13	4
Autism CRC Draft Diagnostic Guidelines	15	7
Victorian Education Committee Inquiry into Career Advice Activities in Victorian Schools	4	3
Federal Joint NDIS Standing Committee Inquiry into Early Childhood Early Intervention	15	11



# Outcome 3

## Opportunities for meaningful participation and contribution increase for autistic people

### Public forums

Amaze held three major public forums aimed at building the skills, confidence and networks of autistic people and their families.

*Women and Girls* (October 2017) shone a light on the unique experiences and challenges facing autistic women and girls. The forum featured health professionals, autistic women and the parent of an autistic girl who shared their insights and advice with the audience.

***"The presenters were excellent. I found I could relate to pretty much everything they said and it was an affirming experience for me."***

-- *Women & Girls* forum attendee

The *Autism & Employment* forum (November 2017) explored many issues, including the business case for employing autistic people, employability skills and how to find work, and autistic people sharing lived experiences of finding work and developing their careers.

***"Above all, helping my son believe that he has something positive and valuable to bring to the workplace. To be able to convey that to him and see that glow of confidence that radiates from his face...just priceless. Great job, Amaze!"***

-- *Autism & Employment* forum attendee

*Transition to Secondary School* (June 2018), supported by the Commonwealth Bank Grass Roots Program was aimed at parents of autistic children transitioning to secondary school and teachers looking for ideas on how to support transition. The event covered school-family relationships, school funding, the challenges facing autistic girls in school, and how to support autistic students' learning needs.

***"Many practical tips on helping transition, and good advice on the timing of when communications should take place... Thank you very much for hosting the forum, on what is an important (and anxious) time in the lives of many families living with Autism."***

-- *Transition to Secondary School* forum attendee

### Community resources

Informed by community feedback and suggestions, Amaze develops resources to support autistic people, their families and the wider community. This year, we have created:

- **NDIS Readiness Resource update:** In response to feedback that some parents, carers and autistic people prefer a paper resource, a printable PDF was created from Amaze's existing online NDIS Readiness Resource.
- **Autism Learning Plans:** This free resource, funded by Telematics Trust, is designed for parents, teachers and students at mainstream schools. It includes information about autism, learning plans, goals, parent-teacher meetings and rights and rules.
- **Sensitive Story Time for Librarians:** A free practical guide to creating inclusive story time sessions for autistic children, funded by Newman's Own Foundation.
- **Schools Inclusion project:** Development of surveys for parents, teachers and school leaders to provide a snapshot of schools' inclusive practice, funded by the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust.

## Creating autism-friendly places

Amaze continued to work with public, private and community organisations to build their capacity to delivery autism-friendly experiences. This year, some highlights include:

- **Legoland:** Revision of social scripts, environmental audit and training for 50+ staff prior to aid in their sensory friendly sessions.
- **Arts Centre Melbourne:** Partnered for a relaxed performance of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, which was attended by more than 500 people. Autism training was delivered to 200+ theatre staff, and a social script was created.
- **Disney:** Partnered to hold a relaxed performance of *Aladdin* at Her Majesty's Theatre, with over 600 people in attendance. Training was delivered to 40 volunteers and 50 theatre staff, and a social script was created.
- **National Gallery of Victoria (NGV):** Developed four social scripts and conducted an environmental audit ahead of NGV's *MoMA: 130 Years of Modern and Contemporary Art* exhibition.
- **Parks Victoria:** Created social scripts for five parks: Jells Park; Buchan Caves; Tidal River; Serendip Sanctuary; and Wilsons Promontory as part of Parks Victoria's move to ensure greater accessibility.
- **ACMI:** Conducted for an environmental audit ahead of running a sensory-friendly session of the *Wonderland* exhibition, and provided autism awareness training to ACMI staff.



## Making Amaze a more inclusive workplace

### Autism, ableism and disability

As part of our commitment to staff development and the creation of an inclusive workplace, autistic Board member Rachel McNamara presented to Amaze staff on neurodiversity in early 2018. Rachel's presentation provided staff with vital insights into the cultural identity of autistic people, ableism and ableist language, and contemporary views of disability and autism in society.

### Autistic staff representation

Amaze was very proud and excited to welcome three new autistic people to the team, in key roles across the organisation. This is a first step in our proactive work to increase autistic representation within the Amaze team; we are committed to continuing this growth, and working to make our recruitment practices more autism-inclusive.

# Our Thanks

Amaze would like to recognise and extend our deepest thanks to the many fundraisers, supporters, partners and donors who make our work possible.

Your generous support is vital to shaping a better future for autistic people and their families – every partnership has impact and every dollar makes a difference.

Thank you.

## Major Future Shapers

- Anonymous
- Ruwani Arambawela
- Jacques Dumont
- Bronwyn and Jim Gannan
- Kirsten Mann
- Lisa and Peter Margate
- Casey McKiernan
- Anthony Sidari
- Heather Winneke

## Trusts and Foundations

- 5point Foundation
- Collier Charitable Fund
- Flora & Frank Leith Charitable Trust
- Gandel Philanthropy
- Helen Macpherson Smith Trust
- The Jack Brockhoff Foundation
- Margaret Attwood Testamentary Trust
- Newman's Own Foundation
- The Norman Mavis and Graeme Waters Perpetual Charitable Trust
- The Sirius Foundation
- State Trustees
- Telematics Trust

## Community Supporters and Fundraisers

- Drouin Country Club
- Kangaroo Flat Football Netball Club
- Sangeetha Natka Ravali
- Elloy Amiatu
- Samantha Darragh
- Kristina Kershaw
- Cassie Smits
- Check and Jon Tan
- Craig Vickers

## Organisations

- Alliance Advisers
- Australian Rail Tram and Bus Industry Union
- Bluestar Print
- Big Fish Technology
- Commonwealth Bank
- Herbert Smith Freehills
- Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union
- Cottons
- EPIC Recruit
- M3property (Vic)
- Moorabbin Timber
- Rack Pallet
- Regis Aged Care
- Stokes Street Studio
- Thick
- Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce
- Village Roadshow
- VicSuper

## Bequests

- The Estate of Valerie Bracher
- The Estate of KT Wong