

Shaping the Future

Annual Report 2018–19



A message from the Chair



It has been a pleasure, in my first year as Chair of Amaze Inc, to watch how effective our advocacy for greater understanding and acceptance of autism has become. We can point to such tangible outcomes as the introduction by the NDIS of \$10,000 fast-track payments, so families with children 0-6* can access interim support while they wait for the NDIA to resolve their backlog.

Our activities have regularly brought practical advice and support to the community. Our *Do One Thing for Autism* campaign brought to very wide attention adjustments schools and workplaces can make to support autistic individuals. In its first year, our new Hoodie Up fundraiser saw commitment from more than 200 schools and businesses to learn how they can engage and support autistic people in their communities. Funding from the NDIS enabled us to enhance our trusted Autism Advisor service, doubling the number of calls from autistic individuals received in 2019 (over 2018) and bringing greater benefits to autistic people and their families.

Our political advocacy and policy work keep autism issues continually before the public. We have made regular contributions to debate through TV, radio and print media, through advice to government in various fora, and through our robust

policy submissions on disability and mental health. Our *Act for Autism* forum for the Victorian election and the *Change4Autism* policy manifesto for the Commonwealth election made a real impact, as will our new public education TV and radio campaign, funded by the Victorian Government for release in early 2020.

Important changes to the Amaze Inc. Rules were planned during the year, to move our supporters from a paying membership structure to a network of Future Shapers – donors who give regular tax deductible gifts to support Amaze’s work. The changes will streamline Amaze’s operations, releasing funds spent on managing a membership base to be available to support our actual work. The changes will be considered at the Annual General Meeting, with the unanimous endorsement of the Board.

I would like to thank outgoing Board members Judy Brewer (Chair until November 2018) and Katherine Pye (Board member until February 2019) for their passion and commitment, and welcome new members Robert Armour, Jennifer Bell, Check Tan and Peter Heard. I would particularly like to acknowledge our new supporters, SEW Eurodrive and St Kilda Football Club for their interest and great generosity.

Finally, heartfelt thanks to our skilled and effective CEO Fiona Sharkie, and to her loyal staff, who work tirelessly with limited resources.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Bebbington', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor Warren Bebbington
Board Chair

*Children aged 0-6 who have gained access to NDIS and have been waiting >50 days for a Planning Meeting are eligible for this funding.

A message from the CEO



This report lists many of the achievements Amaze has made in the last year which have advanced our strategic priorities to build greater understanding, engagement and acceptance of autism, influence governments to improve systems and policies for autistic people and upskill the wider community to be more autism friendly.

When I started at Amaze five years ago, I was clear that Amaze would be an organization that was a conduit for autistic people to be heard in their own voices. It is not for Amaze to speak for autistic people. This year, we've had autistic people appear in the media and through *Spectroscopic*; work as employees in each of our program areas and on our board; contribute their views and wisdom through our advisory groups, surveys and consultations; and contribute to our submissions to a range of government inquiries.

In September we launched data on the education experiences of autistic students. Young Blake, a year 6 student, told an audience of parents and government policy makers of the many ways his school was supporting his needs – so much so that Blake was now mentoring an autistic prep student.

In April, we met Kirk, a self-employed autistic graphic designer, through *Spectroscopic*. Kirk later appeared at the Autism @ Work Summit, where he spoke of challenges in job seeking and developing his own self advocacy to promote himself as “different not defective”.

Recently, one of our Autism Advisors told me that she'd had a call from a young man who was doing a school assignment on autism. As a child, his family had called us to access the Helping Children with Autism funding – what a joy to have him call us in his own right years later.

Engaging autistic people in all our work, quite simply, makes the work better. Only autistic people can tell us about the experience of being autistic and what needs to change to improve their lives. Every day they teach me more.

My thanks to the Board of Amaze for its continued support and most of all to the staff who come to work with a quest to make the world a better place for autistic people and their families.

Amaze is poised to seize many new challenges into the future, including our expansion into a national landscape. We will do this with autistic people beside us and guiding us.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fiona Sharkie". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Fiona Sharkie
Amaze CEO

Outcome 1:

Build understanding of autism in the wider world

Spectrospective 2019: work

This year, Amaze's annual short film explored employment. 20 autistic individuals shared stories of employment – their successes, challenges and dreams for the future. More than 2,000 people watched *Spectrospective* at 15 Village Cinema sensory-friendly screenings. The film and trailers were viewed more than 80,000 times online (up from 59,000 last year). Website visitors rated *Spectrospective* 7.9/10 for helping them understand autistic people's needs, and 7.7/10 for identifying ways they could support autistic people.

One Thing for Autism: education and employment

Amaze released the education and employment findings of our *Community Attitudes toward Autism and Lived Experiences of Autistic People* studies. Among its compelling insights, this Australia-first study revealed that 97% of autistic students experience educational restrictions and 20% of autistic respondents had lost a job due to their autism. To help turn these statistics around, Amaze developed a resource on practical adjustments schools and workplaces can make to support autistic individuals as part of our *Do One Thing Campaign*. This resource reached more than 8 million people.

Victoria's first autism public education media campaign

Amaze was awarded funding to produce Victoria's first autism public education campaign. Campaign concepts were developed and tested with autistic people and the wider community to ensure they met our goal of building understanding and support for autistic people and their families. The chosen campaign will launch on Victorian TV, radio and online in 2020. It aims to show millions of Victorians how small changes in their behaviour can make a world of difference for autistic people and their families.

Amaze and autism in the media

Amaze's media outreach on issues such as education, complex needs and employment received substantial coverage, including *Nine News*, *Mamamia*, *ABC*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Sky News*. The *Community Attitudes* studies achieved media coverage worth more than \$700,000 in *The Australian*, *The Guardian* and *SBS News*. In early 2019, we released *Talking About Autism*, an information kit for journalists. This resource aims to positively change media reporting and improve experiences for autistic people as readers and subjects of news about autism.



+42%

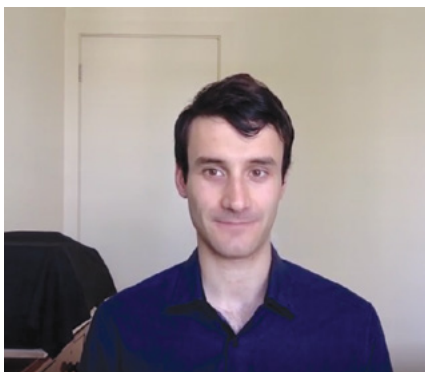
increase in
online views of
Spectrospective

172,000

visitors to the
Amaze website

+53%

growth in our social
media community



Kirk Cetinic in *Spectrospective* 2019



Ryan New in our public education campaign

Outcome 2:

Influence systemic change in government, private and social sectors

Act for Autism: Victorian election campaign

Amaze was joined by Aspergers Victoria, Different Journeys, the I CAN Network and Yellow Ladybugs for *Act for Autism*, a campaign to ensure autism was on the agenda for the Victorian election in November 2018. Amaze developed a policy manifesto and an advocacy toolkit, and hosted a forum with representatives from the major parties to interrogate how they would act for autism if elected. Amaze is now working with the Andrews Government to ensure action on the identified priority issues.

Change4Autism: Federal election campaign

Ahead of the 2019 federal election, Amaze joined with colleagues in the Australian Autism Alliance on #Change4Autism, highlighting priority issues for the next Commonwealth Government: action on the NDIS, a National Autism Strategy, a Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse and Neglect of People with Disability, and a sustainable advocacy sector. We met with 25 politicians and advisors in Canberra and campaigned on social media. All major parties committed to acting on our priorities and a Senate motion calling for a National Autism Strategy was passed on World Autism Awareness Day.

Shaping the NDIS

Through the NDIS CEO Forum and Autism Advisory Group, Amaze amplified the voices of autistic people in decision-making, and we developed submissions to Parliamentary committees and inquiries to shape delivery of the Scheme. A major achievement was the adoption of the Australian Autism Alliance's recommendation for an interim payment of \$10,000 from the NDIS to children aged 0-6, to fast-track access to critical early intervention supports and overcome unacceptable delays for thousands of children.

Driving systemic change

This year Amaze made four substantial policy submissions into: assistive technologies and the NDIS; thin markets in the NDIS; accessible building codes; and mental health. Through these submissions (available on our website), Amaze has advanced our advocacy to influence government on issues of importance to our community and push for system change. We further ensured the needs of autistic people were conveyed through our membership on 14 government advisory groups and committees, including the NDIS Autism Advisory Group, Victorian Education Strategy Advisory Group and the NDIS CEO Forum.



4

major policy submissions

3,700

people watched our Act for Autism election forum

150,000

social media users were reached by the Change4Autism campaign



Jon Tan in *The Australian*



Alliance members with the Hon Linda Burney MP

Outcome 3:

Build the skills of autistic people, their families and the wider world

Building a better helpline

Amaze received NDIS funding to enhance our Autism Advisor service. We installed IT systems that enable us to provide a more efficient service; offered a new webchat option; extended opening hours; and established an advisory panel to better understand what the autism community needs from the service. The enhancements have been hugely successful: 93% of callers feel more NDIS ready, and 82% are more positive about their issues. We've doubled the number of autistic callers, 75% of whom understood more about their rights after contacting an Advisor.

Hoodie Up 2019

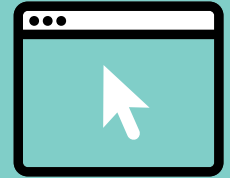
In April 2019, more than 200 schools and businesses across Victoria showed their support for autistic people by joining Amaze's inaugural Hoodie Up fundraising campaign. We asked people to wear hoodies in recognition that many autistic people use hoodies to manage sensory sensitivities. Getting together in April and putting our 'hoodies up' is a simple way to acknowledge autistic people's sensory needs and show support for autistic friends and colleagues. Through Hoodie Up, the Amaze community raised an incredible \$15,000!

Inclusion Champions: St Kilda Football Club

St Kilda Football Club has become an Amaze Inclusion Champion, committed to building greater engagement with their autistic fans. Our partnership has seen the creation of a Chill Out Zone at Marvel Stadium, where autistic individuals and their families can manage sensory overload; a social script for fans to more easily navigate the stadium; and training for SaintsPlay coaches and volunteers, building their autism understanding and creating a more inclusive environment for autistic children.

Reaching out to Regional Victoria

In October, our team hit the road for the Amaze Regional Roadshow: free one-day information forums in Geelong, Ballarat, Traralgon, Bairnsdale, Wodonga and Bendigo. Experts, both professional and lived experience, shared their insights into education, employment and the NDIS, and attendees were able to exchange information, advice and ideas for navigating their autism journeys. *"It eased my mind... there's such a vast array of help out there, and we don't have to walk this journey alone. Amaze, thank you"* - Bendigo attendee.



+18%

increase in contacts to AA service

80%

of contacts have taken action as a result of the information provided by the Autism Advisors

+88%

Attendance at public forums up 88%



St Kilda Football Club Hoodies Up in April



A young autistic footy fan at Marvel Stadium

Committees and advisory groups

Amaze is a member of a number of advisory groups and committees at state and national level. We provide evidence-based advice to inform policy development and research that will create meaningful change for the autism community.

Victoria

Disability Stakeholder Reference Group (Department of Education and Training)

Victorian Autism Education Strategy Advisory Group

Victorian Autism Plan Advisory Group

Victoria Police Disability Portfolio Reference Group

NDIS Implementation Taskforce Market Readiness Working Group

National

NDIS Autism Advisory Group

NDIS CEO Forum

Australian Autism Alliance

Australian Advisory Board on Autism

VCOSS Empowered Lives Advisory Committee

VCOSS Education Equity Coalition

Australian Network for Universal Housing Design

Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) Advisory Committee

Australian Autism Research Council

Thank you

Amaze would like to thank our donors for their generous support in shaping the future for autism and creating a more inclusive world for autistic people and their families.

Future Shapers

Anonymous
Alan Bourne
Alex Garrett
Beryl Roberts
Bianca Pallaga
Catherine Ravanello
Christopher Hogan
Elissa Robinson
Helen Marchant
Hoang Ngoc Chau Nguyen
Irfan Ahmed Syed
Jane Ruljancich
Jim Ritchie
Kerry Smith-Amato
Leigh Sampson
Lisa Margate
Lyndall Montague
Melanie Chan
Mirella Lattanzio
Nancy Biddulph
Paul Katz
Pimolpun Ponglertnapakorn
Robyn Bulman
Sharon Hargreaves
Yugandhar Gubbala

Community Supporters and Fundraisers

Ben Lee
Check and Jon Tan
Latrobe Golf Club
Lions Club of Coleraine
Qantas Structures Social Club

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The Sirius Foundation
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CFMEU Victoria & Tasmania
Commonwealth Bank
Employment Office Melbourne
Herbert Smith Freehills
Litmos APAC
SEW-Eurodrive
St Kilda Football Club
Village Cinemas
WISE Employment

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Amaze Inc.

24 Drummond Street, Carlton
PO Box 374, Carlton South VIC 3053
www.amaze.org.au

Phone: 03 9657 1600

Email: info@amaze.org.au

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