

Partnering with our community

A year in review 2021–22

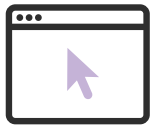




Front cover photo

Hoodie Up champions:
Brothers Fletcher, Felix and Sebastian ready for Hoodie Up

2021-22 highlights



676,722

visits to the website



48,755

followers across all channels

3,548,037

impressions across all channels



178

events, presentations,
training and workshops



6

government
submissions

Autism Connect

36,558

interactions (calls,
emails, webchats, SMS)



1,235

partnerships and collaborations – local search
organisations, service delivery partners,
promotional partners, consultation and co-
design partners



12,618

requests for support



669

autism resources

682,788

times digital resources and information
accessed times by the public

Amaze at a glance

Our vision

An Australia that embraces Autistic people and their families living their best lives.

Our mission

To create positive change with Autistic people and their families at all life stages by advocating, influencing, innovating, mobilising efforts and opening doors. This ambition will be realised by being a trusted source of information, advice and support and a willing partner in the development of new practice and approaches.



F1 Grand Prix low sensory pit walk:
The Australian Grand Prix's world first inclusive pit lane walk attended by children and families from our community



Promoting greater understanding and acceptance:
Amaze partnered with the Victorian Parliament's Community Engagement Unit to present the first ever *Autism@VicParliament* week

Our values

We recognise that our mission and vision will not be achieved by working in isolation, we are of and for the community. We will always adopt a strengths-based approach to our work, and we will maintain our independence and support the work of all partners. These are the standards to which Amaze will be held accountable.



Community centric



Collaboration and partnership



Constructive and solutions focused



Determination and independence



Evidence informed and outcomes driven



Strengths based

Message from our Chair



It is with great delight that we bring you our 2021-22 Annual Review sharing some of the key events and activities over the year.

Jim Mullan's first year as Chief Executive Officer has begun a transformative period for Amaze, and the Board is proud of what has been achieved under his leadership.

Strengthening existing relationships and establishing new partnerships was a key focus for the year, promoting greater engagement with our peer organisations as we all seek to enhance understanding and acceptance of autism in the community.

This focus is a theme of our new *Strategic Plan 2022-2026*, which highlights the importance of working in collaboration with others to achieve our goals.

Two new Autistic Directors completed their first year on the Board, Kathy Issacs and Gabrielle Hall. Their appointments have strengthened the autism voice in our governance, and I am very pleased to have them involved. The year also was the last as Director for Jennifer Bell, who

leaves after four years service, and I am grateful that such a busy legal practitioner was able to find time to support our work over these years.

We continue to be supported by donors and partner organisations, and on behalf of the Board I would like to thank all of them: their gifts help us create positive change for Autistic people and their families.

Finally, my thanks to the Amaze Executive team for their hard work and dedication, and to the *Autism Connect* Advisors for the empathetic support and informed advice they provide to Australia's autism community every day.

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

Professor Warren Bebbington AM
Chair, Board

Message from our CEO



It's my great pleasure to deliver Amaze's Annual Review after a rewarding first year. One of the highlights included partnering with the Victorian Parliament's Community Engagement Unit to present the first ever *Autism@VicParliament* week in June, which coincided with the 5th anniversary of the Victorian Parliament's landmark Autism Inquiry Report.

The week was a wonderful opportunity for collaboration, with Amaze and other autism organisations engaging with Members of Parliament around the issues impacting Victoria's sizeable Autistic community and what more needs to be done.

Autism@VicParliament week was a celebration of Victoria leading the way in this country, around the development of policy, practice and services for Autistic people, and it was a great opportunity for Amaze to be a part of – promoting greater engagement, understanding and acceptance.

In other major milestones, in June we celebrated the one-year anniversary of the national launch of *Autism Connect*, the national autism helpline. The service has made an incredible impact Australia-wide, supporting Autistic people, families and carers, professionals and the general public with evidence-informed information.

Amaze was honoured that the *Change Your Reactions* campaign was a joint winner of the 'Excellence in creating inclusive communities' award at the Victorian Government Disability Awards ceremony. The campaign was Australia's first social behaviour campaign to promote understanding and inclusion of Autistic people.

In other ongoing education efforts, in May, Amaze was excited to launch 'What is Autism',

a free online course suitable for everyone who potentially interacts or engages with Autistic people and communities. The self-paced course gives a deeper insight into autism using written, audio and video content, and has already been accessed over 1,240 times.

Ensuring we continue to engage with a broad cross-section of the community is a key focus for Amaze, and we have begun the process of developing our first Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). This RAP is the start of our journey with reconciliation and will set out actions to increase awareness and respect for First Nations cultures within our organisation. Our RAP will focus on opportunities to empower and strengthen relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and engage our staff and stakeholders in reconciliation. We look forward to working in partnership with First Nations organisations and communities to bring our RAP to life.

Working together with our partners leads to greater shared success and positive outcomes for our community and we're excited to build upon these connections in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Mullan', written in a cursive style.

Jim Mullan
CEO

Year in review

This year we launched a new five-year Strategic Plan. This plan builds upon the foundations of Amaze’s 50-year history of supporting the autism community in Victoria and highlights the importance of working in collaboration with others to achieve our goals. We believe we are stronger with a shared voice and that working together leads to greater shared success.

The **Strategic Plan** outlines the five priority areas that direct our work. These Strategic Priorities reflect the areas that we believe have the greatest opportunity for impact for the community.

Cross-cutting these priorities are the ongoing supports we provide to Autistic people and their families at all ages, including those in our community who have high support needs or who may experience multiple forms of challenges or disadvantage.

In addition to the work listed under the Strategic Priorities, Amaze delivers activities and programs that run across all these areas and impact the

autism community as a whole. These include the *Autism Connect* helpline service, and the *Autism Peer Assist* program to support and build the skills and knowledge of parents and carers and our advocacy efforts.

Our advocacy efforts both align with our priorities and focus on areas that broadly impact the autism community. For example, during the year we made several submissions to the Disability Royal Commission and created a **Disability Royal Commission Autism Hub** to keep the autism community updated on findings and recommendations that may impact them.

The following sections provide an update on our progress under each one of our strategic priorities. This is the first year that we will be aligning our priorities and achievements within the annual review.



Assessment and diagnosis



Health and mental health



Employment



National Disability Insurance Scheme



Education and training



Amaze’s annual Hoodie Up campaign runs every year in April during World Autism Acceptance Month. Hoodie Up is a campaign to show understanding, acceptance and support for the Autistic community.

People across Australia wore their hoodies up, held their own Hoodie Up events and shared on social media resulting in a reach of nearly half a million people across the month. We look forward to the campaign continuing to grow in size in 2023.

Autism assessment and diagnosis



Having an autism diagnosis can help Autistic people to build self-understanding, identity, community connections and well-being. We want all Autistic people to have access to timely and affordable diagnosis. An accurate diagnosis enables adjustments to be put in place so Autistic people can do their best at school, at work and in life.

IPC Health pilot project

In February to March 2022, in partnership with Improving and Promoting Community (IPC) Health and supported by WAVE design, Amaze co-designed an Autism Assessment Model. The model was created to help combat the long wait times, technical and logistical challenges, and financial barriers that many families face when seeking a diagnosis.

Some of the key features provided by the Autism Assessment Model provides are a wellbeing coordinator for family support, a one-stop shop for autism assessments, and wrap-around supports and information. The model was piloted in May 2022, and families' costs were covered by Amaze. The overall feedback from the pilot was that families felt the assessments and supports gave them answers and future direction in a caring and efficient way.

The evaluation of the pilot will inform how the Model can be improved in the future.

Early Days

Early Days is a national initiative providing free workshops for parents and carers of young children (aged 0 – 6) who have a diagnosis of autism, or who are currently undergoing a diagnosis. Autism organisations around Australia deliver the workshops in their state, with Amaze facilitating workshops in Victoria. This Financial Year, we recruited two new Early Days Champions to support the delivery of workshops and returned to some face-to-face delivery after delivering all our sessions online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We delivered 40 workshops over the Financial Year with 371 attendees, and participants reported high levels of satisfaction.

One of the notable themes evident from participants attending the workshops is the value and need for peer connections and ongoing support beyond the workshops, where the Early Days program is the connector in these important early moments of their journey. There is growing interest for workshops tailored for the Vietnamese community as well as other culturally and linguistically diverse groups. This is something that began before COVID-19 and that we plan to explore in the next Financial Year.

Employment



We know that Autistic people overwhelmingly want to work and are an asset to the Australian workforce. We want Autistic people's needs and value to be recognised and supported by government, employers and employment service providers.

Autism Positive Employment program (A+)

Amaze works to help the wider community to better understand autism. We have a key focus on assisting employers to be autism positive and create inclusive, sustainable support for autism employment.

Amaze is committed to develop, launch and rollout a nationwide program to workplaces to improve awareness and understanding of autism and dispel myths. The program will upskill HR teams and management teams to successfully remove any barriers and recruit, onboard and support Autistic employees through their full employee lifecycle. In addition to upskilling managers and HR teams to understand, accept and adapt processes, policies and practices, we also will work with organisational leadership to identify focus areas and appropriate metrics to measure impact over time.

At this stage, the A+ offering includes the 'What is autism' online learning that can be completed on Amaze's website or can be hosted on an organisation's Learning Management System. The training is designed for all employees to increase their autism understanding. After completing the course, participants will know more about autism and the diversity of the Autistic experience.

To date, Amaze has the support of over 10 organisations of varying size with national footprints and a wide variety of roles to support our focus on improving the employer environment for Autistic individuals.

Ultimately, this whole of organisation approach will be successful if every employee is afforded the chance to participate in all or some of the A+ program's offerings.

Member of reference group on Disability Employment Services redesign

During the year, Amaze was one of the consulting organisations for both the Disability Employment Service redesign taskforce and the NDIS Participant Employment Strategy Action Plan for 2023 and we look forward to our ongoing involvement in the future.

Education and training



A good education is the foundation for a good life. We want to see our early learning, schools, vocational and higher education sectors enabling Autistic people to thrive.

Advocacy and engagement with DET

Our engagement with the Victorian Department of Education and Training (DET) continued, with monthly meetings with senior public servants held across the reporting period, allowing us a clear line of communication to raise and discuss education priorities for Autistic learners.

Executive functioning: Tips for Autistic teens

Through funding received by DET, Amaze developed *Executive functioning: Tips for Autistic teens*, a series of videos and supporting fact sheet to assist Autistic students and their teachers and parents. Created with input from Autistic people, an occupational therapist and education professionals, these resources provide practical strategies young people can use to build their executive functioning skills.

Inclusive education resources

With funding support from DET, Amaze led the development of evidence-based resources to help families, schools and communities better understand inclusion and how we can all contribute to building more inclusive environments.

The project was aimed at parents and carers of students without disability and a suite of resources including videos, factsheets, posters and social media tiles were created. These resources were a creative collaboration between a number of disability and youth organisations, and have been developed in consultation with families, students and teachers with and without disability in the community. We thank all the individuals and organisations who have shared their perspectives and stories throughout this project.

Advocacy

Amaze was also involved with the Victorian Autism Education Plan Advisory Group and the Victorian Education Disability Inclusion Advisory Group.

Health and mental health



Supporting the improvement of the health and wellbeing of the Autistic community is critical as it impacts upon every aspect of life. We consider health from a holistic standpoint, recognising that there are many social factors such as income, nutrition, housing, physical activity and social inclusion that influence health outcomes.

COVID-19 response

To support Autistic people to get their COVID-19 vaccinations and understand changes and impacts from the response to COVID-19, Amaze worked with the Department of Health, Department of Families Fairness and Housing and other autism organisations in Victoria to promote accessible vaccination resources and the supports available.

This work included creating vaccination resources (such as social scripts and appointment checklists), accommodations to make vaccination easier, sharing community vaccination stories through a social media 'influencer program' and interactive webinars, providing details of the vital work of the Disability Liaison Officer program, (which supports people with disability to get vaccinated), and updating the community about accessible vaccination pop-up clinics.

Mental health collaboration

In 2021, Amaze and the Victorian Department of Health (Mental Health and Wellbeing Division) convened a historic Roundtable on Autism and Mental Health. A **communique** was developed as a record of the meeting, setting out several important activities that Amaze, our sector partners, and the Victorian Department of Health will be undertaking.

Amaze also contributed to the 2021 ASfAR (Australasian Society for Autism Research) national conference on health, wellbeing and suicide prevention in autism.

We also met with local mental health partners such as the Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health, Steve Dimopoulos, to discuss future opportunities around mental health and the community.

Supporting Autistic young people with healthy video gaming

Amaze was awarded an eSafety Commissioner's grant to educate parents and carers on healthy online gaming so they can support their school-aged children to create healthy habits.

As a result of this project, parents and carers were delivered information on what healthy online gaming looks like and provided with practical strategies to support their children to develop healthy online habits. **Amaze's resources, webinars and videos** supported parents and carers to keep primary and secondary school-aged Autistic children safe online by providing strategies to create healthy and safe online habits.

The resources were developed with input from GameAware and Next Level Collaboration, who are experts in gaming and creating online safe and healthy environments, and with lived-experience input from Autistic people and parents of Autistic children. The resources will be delivered through 2022 and 2023.

Advocacy

Amaze was also involved with the development of a National Roadmap for Improving Health Services for Autistic People, including providing background on health and autism.

National Disability Insurance Scheme



The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provides life-changing supports. Ensuring it works well for Autistic people, the largest participant group in the NDIS (around a third), will deliver significant benefits to the Autistic and broader Australian community.

Autism Advisory Group

Amaze has contributed actively as a member of the Autism Advisory Group, which provides guidance to the CEO and senior leadership of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) about the operation of the Scheme and its impact on Autistic participants. The group has provided a first point of contact with respect to the development and delivery of new guidance and information to both NDIS participants and families. It has also provided a forum for the discussion of quality of services, distribution of services and market stewardship.

Advocacy

Amaze has also engaged in advisory groups to Australian governments on a range of other areas including the:

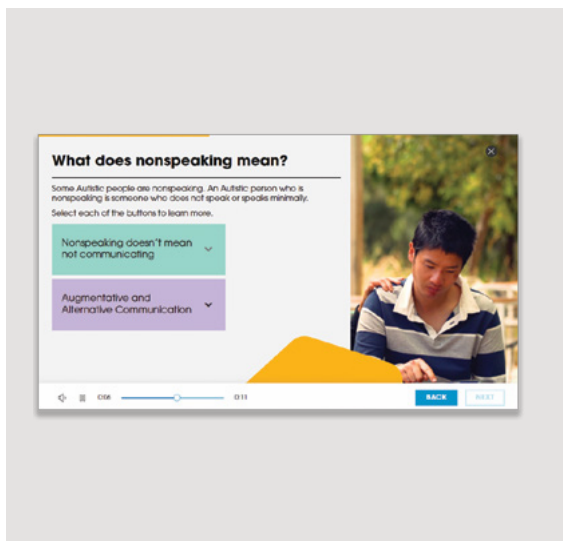
- Victorian Autism Plan Refresh Group
- Victorian NDIS Community Advisory Group

Amaze was also involved in the Victorian Diverse Communities Working Group, the Australian Advisory Board on Autism, Australian Autism Alliance and OTARC Advisory Group across a range of issues including election positioning, government engagement, education and research, accessibility of supports, NDIS feedback, cross sectoral support and coalition building.



Vaccination support for Autistic people:

A mother and son at a low sensory vaccination clinic



Supporting a more inclusive Australia for Autistic people:

Amaze's 'What is autism' free online training launched

Our thanks

Amaze would like to thank our donors for their generous support in creating an autism inclusive Australia for Autistic people and their families. Thank you to everyone who made a donation including the following organisations for funding and support:

Bequests

Estate of Maxwell Arthur Thomas Mawson

Estate of Patricia Richards

Organisations

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Symal Infrastructure Pty Ltd

CFMEU Metro

ETU

Claudine Revere

Turosi Giving

Coles

The University of Melbourne

State Library Victoria

Australian Air Force Cadets

Shrine of Remembrance

Icon

A.J. Barley Sale McGrath St Kilda - Real Estate

National Disability Services (NDS)

Trusts and foundations

Pethard Tarax Charitable Trust

Norma, Mavis & Graeme Waters Perpetual Charitable Trust

Margaret Attwood Trust

Giving 4 Tomorrow Foundation

Veith Foundation

Government

Australian Government Department of Social Services

Australian eSafety Commissioner

National Disability Insurance Agency

Victorian Government Department of Education and Training

Victorian Government Department of Families, Fairness and Housing

Victorian Government Department of Health







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