

# IT'S BEEN A WHILE...

and do we have NEWS FOR YOU!

August 2023



## A message from the CEO

### Welcome to our first newsletter for 2023!

It's been a while since I've updated you, and it's been a busy year – so grab a coffee, pull up a comfy chair and let me fill you in on what's been happening!

We commenced 2023 on an extremely positive note, with our funders and partners showing confidence in Empower Autism and the impact we've been making, by extending our existing funding and providing additional funding for some innovative new programs.

The extended support by the Department of Social Services was greatly appreciated and has resulted in us being able to: -

- Continue the expansion of our [Peer Support Groups](#),
- Continue our [Peer Mentoring program](#), matching autistic mentors with autistic mentees,
- Continue the rollout of our [emPOWER UP](#) life skills programs at no cost to participants. These programs are all designed by autistic people for autistic people and provide strategies and empowerment for independence, community participation and employability,
- Continue our partnership with Amaze to provide their [Autism Connect](#) information and support program locally in Queensland.

We also commenced the year with a new funder, with the Queensland Government's Department of Small Business and Training providing us

Skilling Queenslanders for Work funding, for our [Empowering Abilities Program](#), allowing us to assist autistic people to gain a Cert II, in an autism affirming environment.

Responding to what we see as a real need, we've spent considerable time developing a unique program to assist autistic school leavers with their transition to the work force or further study. SLES (school leaver employment support) programs are not new, with many disability support providers offering programs funded via individual NDIS plans – what is unique about Empower Autism's [Empowered Pathways](#) program, is that it has been specifically designed for autistic people with a focus on individualised coaching and on recognising and affirming the strengths of autistic individuals.

The above are all great initiatives and continue the vital work we do in empowering autistic people; assisting with the development of social networks, building confidence and capacity for self-advocacy, and providing skills and strategies to assist with independence, employability and community participation. What really excites me though, is the work that we're now doing with employers and volunteer-involving organisations; educating them on the benefits autistic employees can bring to the workplace and working with them to build their capacity to support autistic people in the workplace. I personally believe unemployment and underemployment is the single biggest issue facing the autistic community. Through innovative funding provided by the Department of Social Services and a partnership with Volunteering Queensland, Empower Autism is now able to positively impact the employment landscape for autistic people!

Our [AutismWorks](#) program takes a 'hands on' approach to working with SME's in Brisbane, whilst our Volunteer Management Activity is set to provide Volunteering Queensland members with online tools and resources to attract, support and retain autistic volunteers. I consider what we're doing with our AutismWorks program is groundbreaking, not because educating and supporting businesses to embrace neurodiversity is new (there are organisations and individuals doing a great job in this field), but because of our focus on SME's rather than larger corporate's, our hands on approach and the level of support we offer. I'm also really proud of the fact that with 35% of our staff and 47% of our volunteers identifying as neurodivergent, Empower Autism is 'living' our philosophy every day. We're looking for more businesses and more autistic job-seekers to join this program, so if you're interested or you know someone who would be, I'd encourage you to contact us.

I'd like to acknowledge and thank: -

- The Department of Social Services for their continued support and commitment to Empower Autism and to the autistic community.
- The Queensland Government's Department of Small Business and Training for their support.
- Our partners Amaze, Carers Queensland and Volunteering Queensland for their continued contribution to our success.
- Our AutismWorks Employer Partners and their owners/senior management. These people are not only great corporate citizens, they recognise the enormous potential benefits to their businesses of a truly diverse workforce.
- Our amazing team of staff and volunteers for their commitment to Empower Autism, our participants, and the inclusive culture we're building here.

I'd also like to share with you a project that we're looking to get off the ground in the next few months, which I'm enthusiastic about. In my mind, education and knowledge is essential to acceptance and to change. To bring about real change with and for the autistic community, we need people that have an influence in the lives of autistic people to have a better understanding of what it means to be autistic. People like schoolteachers, allied health professionals, police officers, TAFE and/or university lecturers, support workers and many, many others.

So, we'll be looking to develop autism awareness education. This will be developed and delivered by autistic people – to be authentic it has to be! If this resonates with you and you'd like to find out more about what we can deliver and when, please don't hesitate to contact us. I hope you've enjoyed the coffee and the chat. I look forward to catching up again soon.

Cheers

**Tom Moss**  
**CEO**



**'Who I am'** a short documentary following a transgender and autistic teen as he learns to be himself and find support, with the help of their own original animated characters. Research shows that people who are neurodivergent are more likely to be trans or gender diverse.

After being bullied at school, Charlie (pronouns he/they) finally comes out to his mum, setting him on a path of navigating the first steps of his transition - the social transition. Over three years we watch them come out to family, navigate the pandemic, make new friends, find inclusive healthcare, and ultimately settle into their identity with the new name Aether.



Empower Autism was proud to partner with Who I am Director, Naomi Ball, and Walking Fish Productions to host the Brisbane sensory screening of Who I am in June at the Palace Barracks Cinema. The screening was a great success, selling out in the days prior to the event. Attendees had access to visual schedules, sensory spaces and sensory tools to facilitate a positive cinema experience for all.

The event was a wonderful opportunity for many organisations to come together. Volunteers from Amnesty International, Dykes on Bikes and the Empower Autism community came together to create a welcoming

and autism affirming environment at the cinema.

Empower Autism participants and volunteers shared their experience with the audience in a Q & A after the screening.

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## Fresh Future Markets

Are you going to one of the Fresh Futures Markets in Brisbane, Logan or Redlands during August? We'd love to see you there!

The Brisbane, Logan and Redlands Fresh Futures Markets, Post School Options Expos are dynamic events specifically designed for students with a disability, their families/carers and educators.

Through this event, attendees have the opportunity to gain greater insight, understanding and most importantly real-life options on potential transition pathways for young people with a disability to live full, rich and inclusive lives after they complete school.

The Fresh Futures Markets aim to provide students, and those who support them, with direct access to a comprehensive range of ideas, supports and services available, that directly relate to their transition to life after high school.



The event is designed to be a one stop shop for young people and their families to explore their options for training, education, employment and recreation once their formal education has come to an end.

Empower Autism believes these expos are a great idea and provide much needed information for autistic school leavers. We'll be at each of these events: -

- **Brisbane** Fresh Futures Market, Wednesday 2 August 2023, Brisbane City Hall – 9am-2:30pm
- **Logan** Fresh Futures Market, Wednesday 9 August 2023, Kingston Butter Factory - 9am - 2pm.

- **Redlands** Fresh Futures Market, Wednesday 30 August 2023, Alexandra Hills Hotel - 9:30am-2:30pm (TBC).

**We hope to see you at one of the upcoming events!**



At Empower Autism we foster a culture of recognition and appreciation, and our employee spotlight not only allows us to showcase our talented employees, their personalities and journey, but also the specific work they do and why it's beneficial:

**Spotlight:** Jac Lai, Program Designer & Trainer

Jac Lai is our Program Designer & Trainer. She is a vital contributor to the Empower Autism team and brings her autism affirming insight into everything she creates and delivers. Jac has been kept busy lately designing and delivering training to our partner employers for our AutismWorks program.

Recently Jac shared her experience with burnout in this warm and empathic blog she wrote for Reframing Autism.



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*"I guess I always knew I wanted to be a teacher. My seven-year-old self felt extremely proud of assisting my brother to read words like 'lorry' and 'friend'. I was always good with books and words. Books provide a safe space to explore and absorb another world, all its details, characters and environments soaking in. They become part of your own construction of the world. Yet with all the books I could inhale, it still didn't warn me that being both autistic and a teacher without the right knowledge, the right supports and the right self-care, just could not be sustained."*

Read the full blog article here [LinkedIn Blog Article](#)

## **Welcome Back and Congratulations**

Bec Hogan, Manager Marketing & Communications. We recently welcomed back our talented Marketing & Communications Manager, Bec Hogan. Bec has been absent since February, working on her own special project – a beautiful baby girl! Bec and her partner Jez recently welcomed baby Haddie to their family. Congratulations Bec and Jez!



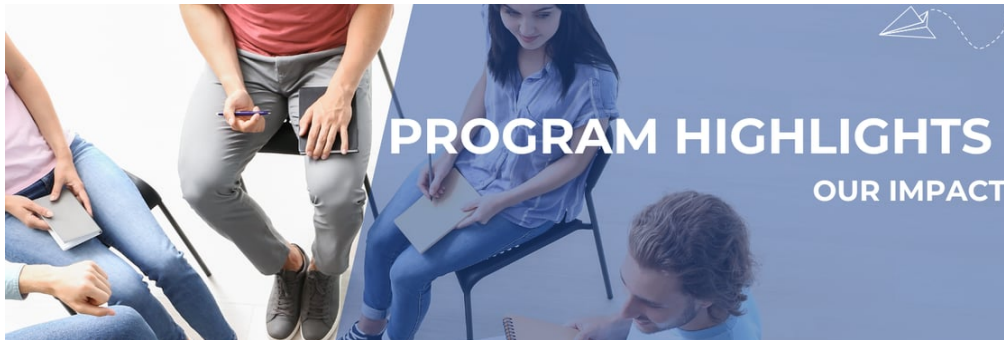
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## **Re-imagining staff roles**

As Empower Autism matures, we need to regularly reassess the roles of our team and the impact of our programs to further enhance our

participant focus. We believe it is important to ensure our participants experience is at the heart of everything that we do. To ensure we have the participant journey as our priority, we have recently introduced participant intake and participant support roles to our team.

Our participant focused approach assists us to deliver on our mission and values as an organisation. It also enables us to clearly demonstrate our efforts are positively impacting the communities we support and the stakeholders we work alongside.



At Empower Autism we're passionate about empowering the autistic community and we have a firm belief that autistic people need to be involved in the design and delivery of programs and services for the autistic community. We're focused on providing programs and creating communities where we see the greatest need.

Here's a little about two of our newer programs, which we believe there is a real need for: -

**[AutismWorks](#)** is a program that aims to positively impact the employment rate for autistic people by breaking down the barriers around traditional recruitment processes, providing support in employment and building the capability of our partner employers to ensure autistic employees can thrive in the workplace. Our evidence-based program also supports autistic people to gain and retain employment with one of our autism affirming partner employers.

We're thrilled to be working with **[Precisionscreen](#)** and **[Movement Solutions](#)** as our current employer partners. We currently have capacity to take on further employer partners, so contact us to find out how your business can benefit from becoming a truly diverse workplace.

*"AutismWorks provides our business the opportunity to expand our employee recruitment and retention skills while also building a more considerate and compassionate workplace, where we all strive to*



*consider how we support each other to thrive at work.” Jonny, Chief Operations Officer, Precisionscreen*

**Empowered Pathways** is designed to support autistic school leavers as they transition out of school and into work. We know how incredibly challenging this transition can be and we have developed a program that will support autistic young people plan for their ideal future. Empowered Pathways program provides support and empowerment facilitated by dedicated Pathways coaches who provide individualised, autism-affirming supports to develop skills and confidence, and explore participants existing strengths and interests. Empowered Pathways builds autistic individual’s “tool boxes” to navigate their career or employment pathway now and into their future.



National Student Volunteer week is on August 7<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup>. We at Empower Autism benefit from the support of volunteers from a range of backgrounds and interests. A large number of our volunteers are students who volunteer their time around their study, work and personal commitments. We would like to acknowledge the value of the contributions of each and every one of our volunteers. Not only for the time they give so willingly to support the running of our programs, but also for sharing the benefits of getting involved in the Empower Autism community.

If what we do at Empower Autism resonates with you, or you would like to recommend us to a friend, we would welcome your involvement in whatever capacity best suits you. We have opportunities for [volunteering](#) across a range of areas and times. We’re also a registered charity with deductible gift recipient (DGR) status which means all [donations](#) over \$2 are tax-deductible.

We are currently developing new and innovative programs and expanding our capacity to support our community in more locations which takes time and money. We would love to talk to you if you’re interested in

sponsoring or funding some of this important work or if you're interested in being involved with specific programs.



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