



Empower Autism

Enabling positive social change
with autistic people

December

NEWSLETTER

A Message from the CEO

As always at this time of year, I find myself reflecting on the past 12 months and contemplating whether 2024 lived up to expectations. In many areas for Empower Autism 2024 exceeded expectations, although in some areas, we had a challenging year.

In May we celebrated 30 years serving the autistic community, which is a huge milestone for a small organisation like Empower Autism! Another milestone was publishing Empower Autism's first 3 year Strategic Plan, outlining our 4 strategic priorities that will guide us over the next 3 years in creating positive social change with the autistic community. I'm also extremely proud of the work of our Board and

Leadership Team in producing the Empower Autism Theory of Change, which sets out our understanding of the change needed for autistic people, and how we plan to work with the autistic community to impact that change.

We positively impacted more autistic people than ever before, through social connection, information and personal development. 2024 saw our peer support groups, peer mentoring, life skills, and employment readiness programs directly impact 298 autistic people, up 50% on 2023. We also directly impacted 80 autistic adjacent people through our peer support groups, as well as supplying support and information to approximately 1000 people.

This year also saw us consolidate and expand our education programs. We remain strong in our belief that education builds knowledge, and knowledge builds acceptance and understanding, which leads to inclusion. Our Autism Works program built the capacity of 6 partner employers in small to medium enterprises to recruit and retain autistic employees.

We, like most small community based organisations, also faced some challenges with changes to the NDIS and to the disability sector funding model. It has been a difficult year for the sector, however, with adversity also comes opportunity and we're fortunate to be looking at some innovative new opportunities in the new year.

I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank

- Our volunteers, who bring enormous capacity with their time, generosity, and enthusiasm;
- Our staff, who are all passionate about our mission and have shown great commitment and resilience over the past 12 months;
- Our Board, who volunteer their time and have provided enormous support, direction and wisdom;
- Our Funders, without who we could not provide the empowerment & education we do;
- Our Partners and Collaborators, who provide us with capacity, ideas, and support;
- Our Participants, who are the reason we exist and who motivate and inspire us with their progress and enthusiasm; and
- Our community of families, allies, supporters, referrers, donors and others who support us, engage with what we do, share our content and resources

and who all contribute to the positive social change we're looking to enable, with autistic people.

Wishing you a safe and relaxing holiday season.

Tom Moss

Chief Executive Officer



Empower Autism takes an 'autism affirming, participant focussed' approach to our programs and services, which means we do our best to understand the individual needs of each of our participants and how we might best meet those needs with programs and services that allow each participant to be themselves and to participate in the way that suits them.

Our 'empowerment' programs and services are focussed on the individual and aim to provide social connection, peer support and mentoring and strategies for life, whether that be independence in the home or the community, employment readiness or transitioning from school to further study or employment.

Some of the highlights for our 'empowerment' programs and services during 2024 were: -

- **174 autistic participants** enjoyed **244 sessions** at our **Peer Support Groups**.
- **80 autistic adjacent participants** enjoyed **142 sessions** at our **Parent/Carer Support Groups**.
- **13 Life Skills** programs were conducted in 2024 providing life skills training for **48 autistic participants**.
- Our **Peer Mentoring program** facilitated **227 mentoring sessions** between autistic mentors and mentees.

- Our **Information, Support and Referral** team helped approximately **100 callers**.
- **Empower Autism's** Autism Connect Advisors provided support and information to over **900 callers**.
- Our **AutismWorks** program provided employment readiness skill development to **39 autistic jobseekers**.
- Our **Empowered Pathways** employment coaching program provided one on one coaching to assist **10 autistic school leavers** in their transition from school to work.



This year Empower Autism has consolidated and expanded our 'education' programs and resources to support employers, volunteer organisations and the community. We believe that educating the mainstream community about autism will lead to a better understanding of autism and greater acceptance of autistic people within the community, thus reducing socially created barriers and positively impacting social isolation for autistic people.

Some of the highlights for our 'education' programs and services during 2024 were: -

- **AutismWorks**, a DSS funded program to build employer capacity in recruiting and retaining autistic employees, provided training, education and capacity building to **6 Employer Partners**.

We launched **Empowered Minds**, an autism awareness education program aimed at school teachers, support workers, first responders, allied health professionals and others who will benefit from a greater understanding of autism.



Celebrating 30 years working for social change with the autistic community

What an achievement...and what a celebration! We held an inclusive event at the Officers Mess where we celebrated with inspiring stories, delicious food and music by Aspie Jones! One of our proudly autistic directors, Casey Archbald gave a moving speech, referencing our past history, our achievements and our aspirations for the future. Our CEO, Tom Moss, also spoke and acknowledged the many people who have contributed to making Empower Autism the organisation it is today, including our founders and especially Stephanie Evans who ran the organisation as a volunteer for 27 years!



Casey Archbald - Director - Empower Autism



Tom Moss & Stefanie Evans



Our Commitment to Positive Social Change

At Empower Autism, we're committed to, and passionate about, the need to create positive social change with autistic people. We believe that responsible organisations should commit to practices that drive this change. For us at Empower Autism, creating positive social change is fundamental to achieving our mission and to how we engage with the community.

In April we launched ***Empower Autism's Strategic Framework and Theory of Change***, a document which represents not only our commitment to the creation of positive social change, but also our view of why that change is needed and how we intend to work with our community to impact that change.

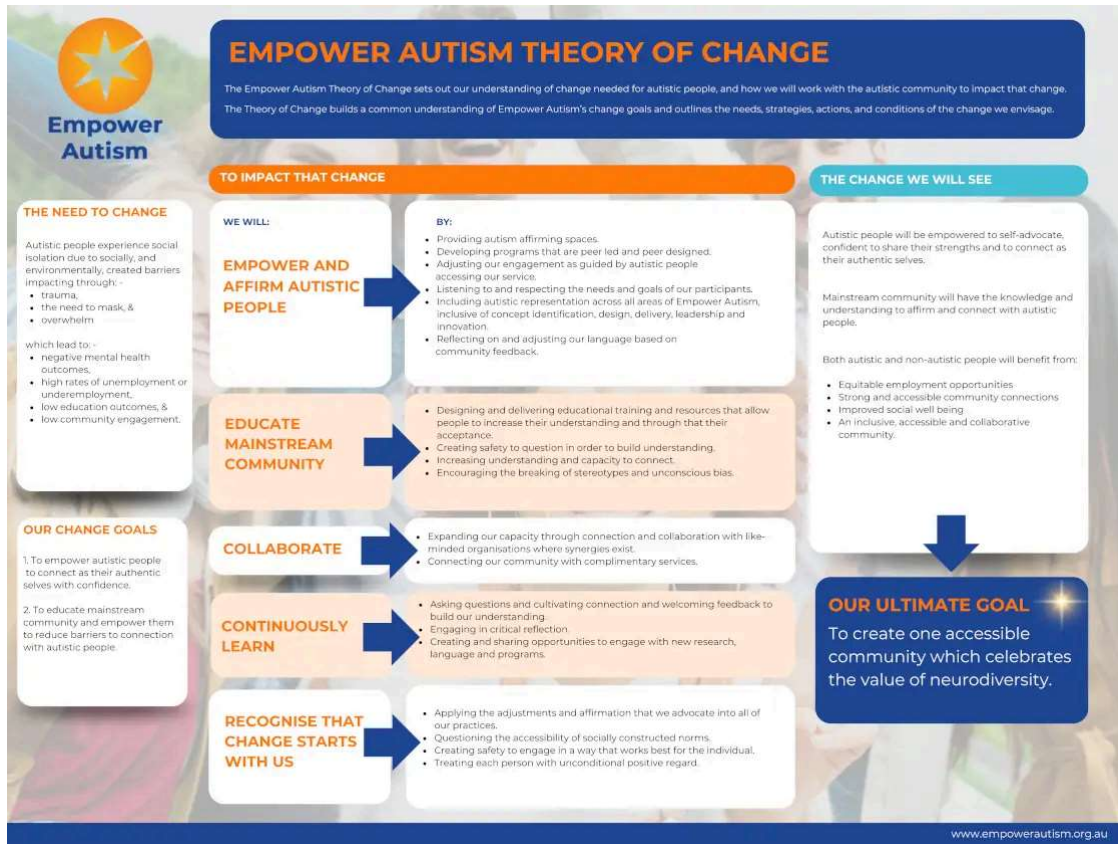
Our ***Strategic Framework*** is our roadmap which sets the direction for us to expand our impact over the next three years. It focuses on 4 key areas:

1. Empowerment of autistic people through design and delivery of programs and services.
2. Education of mainstream community through design and delivery of education and resources.
3. Connection to extend our reach and capacity.
4. Wellbeing of our community.

Our ***Theory of Change*** sets out our understanding of the change needed, and how we will work with the autistic community to impact that change. It builds a

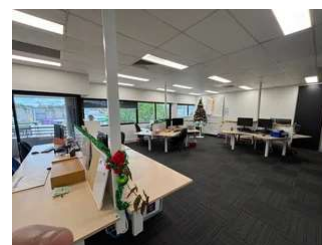
shared understanding of the goals and outlines the needs, strategies, actions and conditions of the future we envisage.

You can find this document here <https://lnkd.in/gb8PsCP7>



A new location for Empower Autism

After 12 years at Yarraman Place Virginia, our tenure came to an end due to the property being redeveloped. We were fortunate to find great new premises in Stafford which we've settled into really well. The new premises are directly above Life Church in Webster Road and are large enough to accommodate our groups and training. We were really fortunate to be donated some great workstations!



Training Our Team!

The team at Empower Autism had the privilege of working with Kory Sherland and her team from Autie Talk in May. Kory is an amazing trainer, who combined her lived experience, her incredible knowledge and understanding of autism, her passion and her heart-centred style to provide us with the tools to continuously improve on our autism affirming practices.

By introducing an external perspective, with the right expertise, we introduced a fresh view of what we do and how we do it. We introduced new and innovative ideas, and we increased the capacity and capability of our team, both individually and as a team. Ultimately, we improved the experience for our participants.

As an organisation whose purpose is to empower autistic people, our participants are our priority, and they deserve to feel affirmed in every dealing they have with us. As an organisation committed to enabling positive social change with autistic people, we want to live the change that we envisage!

A huge thanks to Kory and her team for instilling in our team a shared commitment to questioning and to continuously improving our autism affirming practices. This is so important to the work we do.

Since then, we've worked with Kory to produce this training as an eLearning package for new team members and volunteers.





Fresh Futures Market - What an Event!

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

Brisbane Careers & Employment Expo

We attended Queensland's largest Careers & Employment Event in June at the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre. The Expo hosted over 150 organisations and employers with career opportunities for all ages



Social Change through education and knowledge building!

Our team are passionate about creating an inclusive and autism-affirming community, and we love it when our programs or workshops have an impact!

This year our Education team of Emma, Jac, Kory and Michael have done a number of impactful presentations. A couple that come to mind for their impact were our presentations to a team of senior managers from the Queensland Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety and the Queensland State Network team from The Department of Social Services.

It was a privilege to present to teams who showed such an interest in building their knowledge and understanding of the barriers autistic people face in terms of accessibility and inclusion.

Feedback like the testimonial below is so satisfying to receive.

Testimonial



Attending the **Empower Autism Workshop** has been a transformative experience. The facilitators bring both knowledge and empathy, creating a welcoming and supportive environment. They provide practical strategies tailored for real-life situations, **making it easier for participants to build confidence and skills in empowering autistic individuals.**

The workshop equips you with an understanding to foster more effective communication, understanding, and positive interactions. I walked away with a deeper insight into autism that has continued to offer support long after the workshop ended. **Empower Autism truly empowers not only individuals but also families and communities to create inclusive and understanding environments.**

Mikhaela

Empowered Minds
Workshop participant

@empowerautism

Christmas Holiday Office Closure



OFFICE
NEWS

**Empower Autism's Stafford office will be closed from
Friday 20th December 2024 and will reopen on
Monday 6th January 2025**

- Our Peer Support Groups will close progressively from the end of school term through to mid-December.

- Our adult focused groups will re-open from mid-January, whilst our Youth and Parents Groups will recommence the week school restarts.
- Autism Connect will be open for calls or webchat until the 20th December and will reopen on Monday 6th January 2024.



If what we do at Empower Autism resonates with you, we would welcome your involvement in whatever capacity best suits you.

We have opportunities for [volunteering](#) across a range of areas and times. A number of our volunteers are students who volunteer their time around their study, work and personal commitments. All our volunteers are valued and appreciated, 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.

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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