Enabling 12,000 careers for people on the autism spectrum by 2030.
About Specialisterne Foundation

Specialisterne (which translates from Danish as ‘The Specialists’) is an innovative social business concept originally founded in Denmark in 2004 by Thorkil Sonne.

Specialisterne is internationally recognised as the first and foremost example of how autistic adults can become effectively included in society and provide valuable, high quality services to their employers.

Specialisterne works to enable jobs for autistic adults through social entrepreneurship, innovative employment models and a national change in mindset. We believe that it is not the autistic individual who needs to change, but rather the way the labour market is conducted.

Our key tenant is to shift the focus from ‘disability’ and instead focus on an individual’s ‘specialist abilities’. The global vision is to enable one million careers for people on the autism spectrum through social entrepreneurship, corporate sector engagement and a global change in mind-set. This employment concept has been successfully implemented around the world in Denmark, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Spain, USA, and our global Specialisterne Foundation.

“My vision is to create new possibilities for autistic people and to influence society to adopt a more positive attitude towards autistic people.”

THORKIL SONNE
Why our work is needed

THE ISSUE
While as many as 1 in every 59 people is on the autism spectrum (CDC, 2018), only 40.8% of working age autistic Australians are employed (ABS, 2015). The unemployment rate for autistic adults is more than three times the rate for people with disability (10.0%) and almost six times the rate of people without disability (5.3%).

Autistic individuals are also over-educated and underemployed for roles, with an over-representation in casual employment (Baldwin et al. 2014). Autistic individuals are willing and able to work, with research showing that they can have higher than average abilities in areas such as pattern recognition, memory, analysis or mathematics, and are more productive and more efficient than their non-autistic colleagues (JP Morgan 2016).

However the high unemployment rate of autistic adults only highlights the significant barriers to employment. The traditional standard recruitment practices create a barrier for autistic jobseekers by only assessing for strong communication and interpersonal skills. As a result most autistic individuals don’t progress past the competitive interview, creating a disadvantage to gaining skilled employment opportunities and resulting in organisations not accessing diverse thinking and unique abilities of autistic employees.

Autistic adults have a desire to work and are disadvantaged by traditional recruitment systems.
Chairman's Review

It is with much pleasure that I present Specialisterne Australia’s Annual Report for the year ended June 30 2018.

In less than three years Specialisterne Australia has been able to make great progress in driving opportunities and removing the existing barriers often seen in the traditional recruitment and hiring processes for people on the Autism Spectrum. This has resulted in over 155 individuals securing long-term, meaningful careers in a range of industries.

Following our initial success with a number of large corporate and government clients including DXC, DHHS Victoria, Federal Government, SAP, Weir Minerals, Sunpork Farms, PWC and Westpac, in the past 12 months with some valuable support from the Victorian State Government we have been able to extend our reach to smaller businesses including a number of rural locations like Mildura.

We have also been able to expand our capacity to ensure that we not only locate and assess talent but also support organisations to build their capacity to embed and implement these practices across their workforce in the longer term. This will ensure that autistic talent can continue to pursue career opportunities that extend well beyond the initial targeted programs delivering a lasting Autism Advantage.

I am also very pleased to report the appointment of our first CEO in Australia, Julie Robertson, who has already made a substantial contribution toward expanding the scope and depth of our services. Julie has a wealth of experience in Australia and internationally in both the Autism sector and more broadly in driving innovation into the not-for-profit services sector.

I must also pay special tribute to our magnificent and dedicated Team and to my Board who are all passionately committed to achieving our goal of 12,000 careers for people on the autism spectrum in Australia by 2030.

We are very excited about the year ahead and look forward to extending the scope of our work into other industries and partnering with new employers to explore more inclusive approaches to recruitment and to support organisational staff to identify and embrace the value of diversity in their workplace to harness the Autism Advantage.

- JOHN CRAVEN
“I felt like you looked at me for my strengths and helped me to find and present them instead of feeling like I was working against my challenges all the time.”

CANDIDATE

“The office feels like a second home”

CANDIDATE

“Normally we have just a CV and a 20 minute interview to go by. The Specialisterne recruiting process gives us a much better picture of the participant.”

JOBS VICTORIA EMPLOYMENT NETWORK
Our people

National Manager Business Development & Engagement

Jason White joined Specialisterne Australia in 2016 as Employment Services Manager based in Melbourne. Jason has worked in various programs under the Australian Government’s Employment Services initiatives for more than 10 years. Since 2009 he has worked exclusively with the autism community, with a focus on assisting young adults on the spectrum to participate in employment. Jason has a passion for engaging employers and the community at large to highlight the capabilities of individuals on the autism spectrum and the positive benefit that can be enjoyed from employing them.

National Manager Quality and Practice

Vicky Little is responsible for our program delivery, business development and managing client relationships.

Vicky Little joined Specialisterne in October 2017 as an Employment Services Manager based in Sydney. Vicky is a passionate disability advocate, trainer and mentor with over 11 years’ experience in the field of autism employment in Australia and the UK.

Specialisterne Consultants

Our program consultants work directly with employer organisations to source, develop targeted assessments and simulations to help identify suitable candidates for the types of skills they are seeking. Our team work directly with candidates to help identify their strengths, skills and showcase their talents to potential employer organisations.

“We assist businesses to connect with the untapped talents of the neuro-diverse workforce.”

NICHOLAS GIUSTINO
Our Board of Directors

John Craven

John is Managing Director of Craven Innovation, a boutique consulting firm that assists clients to harness technology to achieve real results through business innovation. Working with senior executives and boards of directors, Craven Innovation identifies innovation opportunities, establishes and directs programs to implement them and develops business strategies to drive transformation and deliver value. It also assists to implement effective Governance over the technology agenda. With more than 40 years’ experience in management consulting and information technology, John has worked with Australian and Asian clients within the communications industry as well as in government, banking, manufacturing and distribution.

Johanna Barker

Johanna (Joh) Barker has extensive corporate, banking and IT experience particularly in the establishment and management of Shared Services. Formally an executive with ANZ and SMS, she has held senior finance, technology and governance positions. Currently she serves on several boards and committees, assisting both start up and corporate organizations with the introduction of new technologies to business practice. With over 30 years experience across both private and public sector boards, she shares a passion for promoting neurodiverse perspectives across the business community.

Thorkil Sonne

Thorkil Sonne is the founder and chairman of Specialisterne Foundation and a director at Specialisterne Australia. Thorkil Sonne’s commitment to expanding opportunities for autistic people began with his son Lars. When Thorkil and his wife learned that Lars was autistic they worried that he would be misunderstood, and face barriers to a successful working life. Thorkil became active within the autistic community and established Specialisterne to change the global mindset around autism and employment. His vision was to create new possibilities for autistic people and influence society to adopt a more positive attitude towards autistic people. The goal is to provide meaningful and productive jobs for one million specialist people on a global scale.

David Spriggs

David Spriggs is the CEO of Infoxchange, the leading Australian practitioner in providing services that enable a more digitally inclusive society. A not-for-profit social enterprise that employs over 100 people across Australia and New Zealand, Infoxchange works towards achieving its vision of ‘Technology for Social Justice’.

David has over 20 years of experience working in senior management positions in the not-for-profit and technology sectors. He is passionate about creating a more digitally inclusive society and the role technology can play in improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the not-for-profit sector. He holds a Bachelor of Information Technology from the University of Queensland and a Certificate in Theology from Trinity College at the University of Melbourne.

Julie Smith

Julie Smith is a marketing and communication professional with over 30 years experience working with organisations to build brands and transform their strategies in line with the development of digital technology. She has been a member of the executive leadership team of major companies in the retail/wholesale sector including Mitre 10, and gained experience internationally when working with Emirates Airline in Dubai. She holds a Bachelor of Science from the University of Queensland and an MBA from The Melbourne Business School.

In addition, Julie has worked with a not-for-profit organisation that assists people re-entering the workforce and is a consumer representative assisting medical researchers at the Walter Eliza Hall Institute.
“We need to develop workplace processes that harness the autistic attributes and not fight against them”

JOHN CRAVEN
About Specialisterne Australia

Specialisterne Australia was established in 2015 with the goal to enable 12,000 careers for people on the autism spectrum by 2030. We are one of the first companies in the world to highlight the benefits of a neurodiverse workforce.

WHAT WE DO
Specialisterne Australia assist organisations in recruiting and supporting people on the autism spectrum. We recognise that autistic individuals offer a range of skills that can be of benefit to any job. We also recognise that the traditional recruitment process disadvantages those on the autism spectrum.

HOW WE WORK
We work with companies seeking to diversify their workforce, and help to find talented autistic staff members looking for a career in that area, for mutually beneficial outcomes. We use a unique process to assess potential employees that aims to remove the barriers experienced by autistic adults in the traditional recruitment process. We then work to support the individual and employee in their transition, and build the capacity of the employer to support their autistic staff members. We help managers to understand the unique strengths of their employee/s on the spectrum, and implement strategies to help them thrive in the workplace.

WHO WE WORK WITH
We work with a range of organisations to assist in the recruitment of a range of positions (with individuals of all ages). To date, we have helped to recruit employees in roles in information technology, records management, agriculture, and engineering. We are just getting started, and look forward to expanding the list of industries in which we work. We are equipped to engage and work with employers across a range of industries. Some of our recent success stories with clients include Westpac, SAP, Weir Minerals, SunPork Farms, PWC, The Federal Government (ATO and ABS) and the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services.
Our supporters & contributors

Specialisterne recognizes and warmly thanks the organisations and individuals that have supported our work through programs, grants, fundraising, in-kind support and collaboration.

CORPORATE SUPPORT
- Clayton Utz
- DFK Nugents
- DXC
- KPMG
- Price Waterhouse Coopers
- SAP
- Sunpork Farms
- Westpac Australia

RESEARCH GROUPS
- Autism CRC
- La Trobe University
- Minds and Hearts

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (Commonwealth)
- Australian Tax Office (Commonwealth)
- Department of Economic Development, Jobs Transport and Resources
- Department of Health and Human Services (Vic)
- Department of Social Services (Commonwealth)
- NDIA - Information Linkages and Capacity Building Fund

COMMUNITY SUPPORT
- Asperger’s Victoria
- Amaze
- Altogether Autism NZ
- EPIC Employment Service
- Autism Awareness Australia

INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT
- Ramon Barker
- Mitch Levy
- Shad Sears

“They have so much talent... we’re the winners here.”
SUPERVISOR
Department of Health and Human Services

Adam Walton, DHHS RISE Staff member
Todd's story

Todd Cefai, has lost count of the number of job interviews he’s been to since leaving university. The 24 year-old studied biology and genetics at the University of NSW, is a self-taught data analyst and adjudicates debating competitions in his spare time. But like many people on the autism spectrum, he’d been unable to land a full time job.

“I’ve had up to 50 interviews, even got to second stage with some, but in none of them got all the way. Getting the foot in the door is the difficult part,” Mr Cefai says.

Todd’s luck turned when he decided to apply for a role with Westpac Bank who have introduced a customised recruitment program “Tailored Talent” partnering with Specialisterne Australia. Todd participated in a 3 week tailored assessment program participating in a series of on-site workshops, simulations and practical work experiences that allowed him to demonstrate his skills to line and hiring managers.

Westpac with support from Specialisterne have adapted their existing hiring processes for this recruitment program specifically for people on the spectrum to create an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their skills and what they are really great at, removing the barriers and obstacles that traditional interview and recruitment processes present.

Todd commenced in his new role in February. He was excited about the opportunity to develop more skills, get more experience and work in an organisation where there is “constant go, go, go”. “The program has been valuable because it allows you to get more information on the job and you can demonstrate your skills and adaptability. There were achievable goals that kept me highly engaged,” he says.
What people say about us

WHAT CANDIDATES SAY ABOUT OUR APPROACH

“It’s very important for me to go through a practical process rather than an interview because I can show my employers and supervisors what I can do in the workplace”

“The organisers of the program and the hiring manager were able to look past my issues with interpersonal communication to see the value that I could add to the organisation.”

“Full-time employment has provided me with structure and a sense of purpose, and has allowed me to start planning for the future instead of living from opportunity to opportunity.”

“I feel treated like an individual, not “an autistic individual” that needs special treatment”

WHAT OUR BUSINESS CLIENTS SAY ABOUT THEIR EMPLOYEES ON THE SPECTRUM

“He managed to singlehandedly diagnose a system wide issue that we have now submitted to our vendor to rectify... his thorough diagnosis of the problem via an email response was sufficient for the engineer to conclude that his prognosis was indeed correct.

This is very impressive for someone so new to our environment!”

MANAGER, WESTPAC

“They have so much talent...we’re the winners here”

SUPERVISOR, DEPT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

“Normally we have just a CV and a 20 minute interview to go by. The Specialisterne recruiting process gives us a much better picture of the participant.”

JOBS VIC EMPLOYMENT NETWORK (JVEN), EMPLOYER

“X (through his personal experience) already has an understanding of cyber security in practice that would exceed the ability of a new graduate”

TEAM LEADER, WESTPAC
Our last 12 months in numbers

- **214**: Individuals attended initial screening workshops.
- **503**: Applicants applied for one of our tailored programs and sourcing activities.
- **95%**: Retention rate of people with autism employed.
- **155**: People directly hired through programs.
- **800**: Co-workers in business client organisations trained in diversity.
- **73**: Individuals fully talent and skills assessed ready for work opportunities.
**Financial Statement**

**TOTAL INCOME**

$842,247.00

- Total gross from government grants: 36.86%
- Total gross from other revenues: 19.21%
- Total gross from goods or services: 43.93%

**TOTAL EXPENSES**

$835,179.00

- Total expenses other: 61.86%
- Total expenses from employees: 38.14%

Full financial report and statements can be found on ACNC site under organisation annual reporting documents. www.acnc.gov.au