Enabling 12,000 careers for people on the autism spectrum by 2030.
About Us:

Specialisterne’s Australian chapter was established in 2015. Our work is to contribute towards our Global Foundation’s mission of creating more meaningful career opportunities for autistic adults. Working with businesses and governments to shift their perceptions of autistic employees through practical demonstration programs, awareness raising and business capacity building and enablement activities. Through this work, businesses develop better understanding and appreciation of the valuable skills, traits and common characteristics that autistic people can bring to the workplace. Since 2015 we have worked with more than 100 national and global client businesses and agencies from across the financial, business, IT, government and consultancy sectors demonstrating how to successfully source, place and retain autistic and neurodiverse employees, as well as develop and enable the longer-term capacity of businesses to value and harness the talents of autistic employees within their businesses here in Australia.

What we do:

Specialisterne’s primary objective is about equity, inclusion and the rights of autistic people to seek, gain and pursue meaningful careers in the open labour market. There is also a sound business and economic argument for governments and businesses in relation to building their capacity and culture to engage autistic employees into their workforce. Autistic individuals can offer a different range of highly employable skills, thinking styles, traits and abilities from their neurotypical colleagues. Many businesses are starting to see autistic jobseekers as an untapped talent pool. To achieve our mission, we work with autistic candidates, businesses and governments to demonstrate practical solutions to the current barriers in recruitment and workplace practices that exist for autistic people. We also use our knowledge and experience to campaign for systemic change in policy and practice across business, governments and industry to develop and adopt more universally inclusive hiring and workplace cultures.

Who we work with:

Governments and businesses

Specialisterne focusses much of its activity in working with businesses to demonstrate alternative practical and more inclusive approaches to recruitment and workplace culture practices. Our work with governments and businesses is focussed on demonstrating these practical and inclusive approaches to assessing and sourcing talents into the workplace. We also work with businesses to build their skills and inclusive cultural practices through training and enablement. Through this work we develop their capacity to embed these practices across all areas of their organisations. We provide enablement training to executives, HR, Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) teams, team managers, supervisors and peers who work with autistic colleagues. Through this enablement work, businesses can provide an ongoing inclusive workplace and culture where autistic employees can thrive in their work and career.

Autistic individuals

Specialisterne Australia works with jobseekers and employees who have a diagnosis of autism. Our work is informed by a deep understanding of the unique skills and capabilities of autistic people. Through our talent programs, we work directly with autistic jobseekers to identify their strengths, abilities and employable skills to ensure that individuals are matched to roles and industries where they can contribute and feel valued.

Our work with autistic individuals goes beyond recruitment sourcing and assessment programs. Once employed, we help individuals to identify any revisions or adaptations they may need to help them in their work and provide mentoring through their transition and induction into their new role, workplace and team. Through initial employment, our team focuses on mentoring and coaching activities, for both the new employee, as well as coaching and mentoring for their line manager, supervisors, peers and other colleagues. Specialisterne tracks and monitors the career progress of all the jobseekers and employees who participate in our programs. Our continued ongoing business mentoring to client businesses ensures practices can be embedded and adopted to ensure autistic employees have meaningful and sustainable careers in an inclusive and accepting workplace environment.

“Our team has all benefited from having someone with a different way of thinking.”

Westpac Manager

“My job at IBM has helped me move onto the next phase of my life. With a stable income, incredible opportunities to learn and grow and no more worry about tackling the neurotypical [traditional] employment system/approach, I’ve been able to look forward to work each day and cherish the opportunity. Feeling accepted for who I am, and my diagnosis has also been incredible, and for the first time in my life I feel like I can identify as autistic without feeling shameful or judged.”

Autistic employee, placed through a Specialisterne program
"I found that I am very good at picking out problems and analyzing situations. My natural skills work very well with the job I am doing."

CANDIDATE

"I'm thankful to Specialisterne and my employer for allowing me to demonstrate my aptitude for the position in a format rarely offered by the traditional hiring process, and with neurodiverse applicants in mind."

CANDIDATE

"Most recently X created a script which takes 30 seconds to do what took 3 hours before X joined us. Truly wonderful."

CLIENT

"Normally we just have a CV and a 20 minute interview to go by."

CLIENT

"I’m thankful to Specialisterne and my employer for allowing me to demonstrate my aptitude for the position in a format rarely offered by the traditional hiring process, and with neurodiverse applicants in mind."

CANDIDATE

"I found that I am very good at picking out problems and analyzing situations. My natural skills work very well with the job I am doing."

CANDIDATE
A MESSAGE FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

It is with much pleasure that I present Specialisterne Australia’s Annual Report for the year ended 30th June 2020.

A recent article written by Andrew Williams of IBM which encouraged Neurodiverse talent to think of a career at IBM included the following observation about why companies like IBM must embrace diversity:

“Within IBM we do embrace difference and truly believe “we can’t be what we can’t see”. In essence, we do not believe we can successfully engage our client base from a business perspective unless we have individuals within the company who reflect the true diversity of the human condition” – Andrew Williams (2020)

Specialisterne has been encouraging businesses for over 16 years to recognise and “harness” the Autism Advantage for sound business reasons, not simply as a short-term charitable gesture. We continue to pursue the goal of 1 million jobs globally for Autistic Talent. This year (2020) marks our 5th Anniversary in Australia. In that time, we have launched almost 400 careers, trained over 4500 co-workers and managers to empower their new colleagues to thrive and influenced businesses large and small to take up the challenge of hiring and retaining Autistic Talent. In 2015 we set an ambitious target for Australia of 12,000 careers and we continue to confidently pursue that goal. With the continuing support of private and public sector clients across Australia we will succeed.

In what has become the cliché of 2020 our Team “pivoted on a dime” back in March when the impact of the pandemic became evident. With the magnificent support of our clients including IBM, PwC, AGL, DHHS, the ATO, Services Australia, DVA and several NSW Public Service Commission agencies, we were able to leverage technology to continue to work remotely delivering talent in a variety of locations across Australia. This is a tribute to the flexibility and hard work of our Team, our client champions and the Talent that continued to demonstrate the unharnessed capacity of the “Autism Advantage”.

On behalf of my dedicated Board may I pass on our gratitude to Julie and her Team and reinforce the confidence we have in the years that lie ahead as we emerge from the challenges of 2020 stronger and more convinced of our ability to not just chase but actually realise our dream for a world where Autistic Talent is appreciated and embraced at work and in society.

“I feel that 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.”

CLIENT
The last year has been one of the most interesting, challenging and unique years of all our lives to date in both our professional and personal worlds. However, with these unique and unprecedented times we have also seen some really positive and innovative changes in practice and attitudes about the ways in which we all work and interact with each other. Within a matter of weeks most business workplaces made radical changes to their business operating and working environments, moving from predominately physical office and site-based work to remote working models or reduced workforce site work.

For many autistic and neurodiverse individuals these sudden and forced changes in workplace practices have allowed for individuals who may have previously been excluded from the workforce, due to the flexible or remote working considerations they may have sought, to seek employment in the open market with the knowledge that employers are now more confident in acknowledging the value of remote or flexible working arrangements as a viable and productive alternative to 100% site or office based working. We at Specialisterne hope that the adaptions and changes businesses have made to their flexible work conditions and arrangements extend beyond the Covid-19 pandemic.

Prior to Covid-19 70% of the Specialisterne team worked from home and periodically on location at client businesses during programs or activities. Since March 2020, 100% of our team has been working remotely and all of our activities, including our previous on location and face to face activities, have gone online or are being carried out in a remote or virtual method. Like many other businesses, we had to come up with agile and alternative working processes and solutions to ensure we could continue to deliver quality programs and services to our business clients and autistic candidates in a safe and responsible way.

We have seen a number of positives and highlights extend from this unexpected and unique situation:

- Our team has been able to innovate, test and fast track some of the prototype virtual approaches and new delivery methods of assessment that we had planned to test and roll out over the next 12 months;
- We have extended the types of service and delivery models we can offer to businesses and candidates;
- We have continued to find, source and assess autistic talents across the country for roles within government and commercial businesses, creating virtual assessment environments that allow for greater engagement and interaction between business clients and candidates throughout the process of our talent programs and activities;
- We have continued to grow and strengthen our influencing campaign through a series of online and web-based interviews and events to shift the way governments and businesses think about their workplace cultures and practices to become more inclusive of autistic people in the workplace:
  - We have been able to grow and develop greater collaboration and sharing of knowledge across our Specialisterne global network as remote and online working and networks have become the new norm; and
  - We have reduced our carbon footprint and have been able to create greater cost, operational and environmental efficiencies in the way we work.

We have also celebrated continued success and external acknowledgment of our work through recent award and nominations including IBM’s Talent Program being a finalist in the Tech Diversity Awards, our Westpac Tailored Talent program being awarded Aspect’s Advancement Award, our Federal Talent Program being a finalist for the ACT Chief Minister’s Inclusion Awards and our RISE at DHHS Program being nominated as a finalist with the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) Graeme Innes Disability Employment Award.

While I reflect on the many positives, I also acknowledge that this year has not come without its many challenges. I want to acknowledge the continued passion, creativity, professionalism, resilience and dedication of our team through this last year. I would also like to extend my gratitude and thanks to our board for their continued support, guidance and direction.

As we move into our 5th full year of operating we look forward to working with our clients and community to continue our work towards our mission and strategic plan objectives. Lastly, I would like to say thank you to all our candidates, the community, our clients, stakeholders and collaborators for your ongoing support and contribution to our work.
OUR PEOPLE

NATIONAL MANAGER BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT & ENGAGEMENT

Jason White joined Specialisterne Australia in 2016 as Employment Services Manager based in Melbourne. Jason has a strong background in assisting young adults on the spectrum to participate in employment. He 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.

FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION

Maurice Garland and Lou Dixon respectively manage the finance and administration functions of Specialisterne.

NATIONAL MANAGER QUALITY AND PRACTICE

Vicky Little is responsible for ensuring quality and practice methods and approaches across all Specialisterne services meet high standards as well as program delivery, business development and managing client relationships.

Vicky 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.

TECHNICAL CONSULTANT

Brett Maverix, our expert Technical Consultant, joined us on a permanent full-time basis in 2019.

PROGRAM MANAGER (QLD, NSW, NT)

Angela Bueti has a strong background in training and education, with extensive experience managing workforce development programs across the private, public and not-for-profit sectors.

PROGRAM MANAGER (VIC, ACT, TAS, SA)

Nicholas Giustino joined Specialisterne Australia in 2018 as a Consultant based in Melbourne. Nick has a strong background in service delivery and training and development in the employment and DES space.

“We work with organisations to develop a culture of inclusion which fosters innovation through diversity of thought and harness the unique strengths of individuals on the autism spectrum.”

KATE HALPIN
SPECIALISTERNE
CONSULTANTS

Our program consultants, Kate Halpin, Natalie Hall, Georgie Walker, Polly Harding, Steph Carayannis and Michele McKell 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.
**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.
“If we helped one individual achieve their potential, what we have done is worth it.”

JOHN CRAVEN
GOAL 1

Use our influence to grow the number of employer businesses who offer alternative recruitment programs and options for autistic and neurodiverse candidates to access career opportunities in the open market.

- We were successful obtaining national grant funding to build capacity of recruitment industry and employer businesses capacity in inclusive recruitment, hiring and workplace culture practices through Department of Social Services Grant and National Information Linkages and Capacity (ILC) Building grants through NDIA.

GOAL 2

Build the capacity, confidence and culture within businesses to recognise the value of and support autistic and neurodiverse employees to thrive in the workplace.

- We have continued to work with Federal Government agencies (ATO, Services Australia and DVA) to expand and grow career opportunities for autistic and neurodiverse individuals through specific hiring programs to embed autistic and neurodiverse career pathways into APS;
- We have extended our collaboration and capacity building activity to engage mainstream recruitment and hiring firms including ClicksIT, Hoban, Peoplebank and Chandler McLeod;
- Worked with 41 employer businesses to train 986 staff / employees in Autism at Work awareness training; and
- We have confirmed further extension of the Westpac Tailored Talent Program into 2020, extending a range of new career opportunities across multiple areas of the Westpac group; AND
- We have successfully completed a pilot Autism Talent Program with NSW Public Service Commission resulting in 14 autistic talents being recruited into a range of skilled roles across a number of public service agencies.

GOAL 3

Assist autistic individuals to learn more about their unique talents, strengths and employable skills through innovative talent programs and activities that lead to meaningful employment opportunities and career pathways in the open market.

- We successfully obtained an extension of Victorian ILC grant funds and facilitated 3 additional “Discover your uniqueness” talent academies with 33 autistic individuals; and
- We facilitated a talent academy demonstration program in NSW to identify and demonstrate the skill sets of autistic individuals placing candidates into roles in multiple businesses including AGL, PwC and DVA.
GOAL 4

Test new and innovative programs and approaches to best identify the skills, strengths and talents of autistic and neurodiverse individuals across a range of professions and industries.

- We have successfully tested a range of new online assessment tools and workshops with candidates and employer industries to enable candidates to showcase their talents and skills using a range of virtual tools and simulations;
- Through our Federal Talent Program with the Australian Public Service and our Jobs Victoria Innovation Fund Program we have been able to extend the range of roles and opportunities outside of IT for autistic candidates; and
- Through securing our ILC National grant funding we will be extending the reach and scope of industries we target in SE Qld to engage and employ autistic and neurodiverse individuals.

GOAL 5

Continue to grow using sound business processes to ensure we can continue to grow a financially viable and sustainable social impact enterprise.

- Board approved operational investment: through this investment we have been able to increase and improve the range of service offerings and activities we provide that both add value to the businesses and the community we work with and at the same time help us to achieve our mission;
- In the last 12 months we have increased the size of our core team across Australia to build greater geographical coverage and have also extended our reach across the types of industries and businesses we work with;
- Implemented a new CRM system, project management tools and recruitment database to ensure effective management and operational systems are in place;
- Adopted a range operational and environmental efficiencies and sustainability practices as a result of Covid-19;
- Invested in development and adoption of a range of new online and virtual assessment tools;
- Grown our collaboration with recruitment industry organisations and other key stakeholder organisations; and
- Increased our collaboration with other Specialisterne Global chapters.

"This is a very worthy program and we are proud to be involved."

CLIENT

"He [Thorkil Sonne, Specialisterne Founder] lit in me a passion to change the status quo within IBM to not only promote diversity, which we have always championed within IBM, but to drive neurodiversity engagement across the whole of IBM globally. So why would businesses like IBM engage neuro-diverse talent? Firstly, I found the unemployment rate among neurodiverse twenty-something people was around 40-50%, so there was a social responsibility out there, but I also found the reason for creating a neurodivergent hiring program was far more tangible and multi-layered. The impact was there on your team, the individual employed, the family, the CEO of your next client, your own boss – all positive impacts. I couldn't find a single reason why I should not pursue this and make it real. When I started connecting with local centres in IBM, I also discovered a strong connection between hiring neurodiverse employees and strong retention outcomes, which is always a challenge for delivery centres."

Andrew Williams, IBM Global Neurodiversity Lead
THE NEXT 12 MONTHS

As we move into our 5th year of operations and the last year of our current Strategic Plan cycle, we have much to do in the next 12 months. Here’s a snapshot of what we have planned:

- Further extend our work with APS to create and embed pathways to career opportunities for autistic and neurodiverse individuals across a range of agencies and occupations;
- Continue to pursue and engage with governments in all states and territories to commit to enabling career pathways into government roles that are inclusive of autistic and neurodiverse individuals;
- Further extend and embed the work with existing client businesses to embed autism and neurodiverse hiring programs into their general business activity;
- Establish new business client relationships with employers from across Australia to demonstrate more practical and inclusive approaches to sourcing and hiring talent and creating more inclusive workplace practices;
- Facilitate 3 placed based demonstration talent academies for employers to build awareness and knowledge of alternative hiring and assessment approaches (ACT, SE Melbourne and Brisbane);
- Further extend our capacity building and enablement activity into mainstream recruitment and labour hire firms. Through DSS and NDIA federal grant activities we will engage 3-4 larger national recruitment firms. We will work with them to develop their foundational knowledge of autism and the valuable skills and traits autistic people can bring to the workplace. We will also work with recruitment firms to develop their knowledge and capacity, look at and understand more practical and inclusive approaches to assessing and recruiting candidates for roles into businesses;
- Through our grant funded activity, we will engage with up to 20 small to medium sized business enterprises to offer business capacity building and enablement to demonstrate how they can attract autistic talents into their workforce by adopting and applying more practical and inclusive approaches to their recruitment and hiring processes. We will also provide foundational autism at work awareness to participating businesses;
- We will continue to engage governments and businesses at all levels and use our social media and other channels to campaign for systemic change in the way we perceive autistic individuals in the workplace;
- We will grow and extend the range of assessment tools and will develop more virtual and online tools to support greater accessibility for candidates and employers;
- We will upgrade and launch our new website.

"My favourite part is feeling like a useful asset to the ABS, and putting my acquired analysis talents to good use."

Autistic employee, ABS Canberra
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**
- Apple
- Clayton Utz
- Clicks IT Recruitment
- DFK Nugents
- Employ for Ability
- KPMG
- Max Solution
- Peoplebank
- Perpetual Trustees
- Pricewaterhouse Coopers
- Summer Foundation
- Westpac Australia

**GOVERNMENT SUPPORT**
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (Commonwealth)
- Australian Tax Office (Commonwealth)
- Department of Health and Human Services (Vic)
- Department Jobs Precincts and Regions (Vic)
- Department of Social Services (Commonwealth)
- NDIA - Information Linkages and Capacity Building Fund
- NSW Public Service Commission
- Queensland Government

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

**COMMUNITY SUPPORT**
- Amaze
- Asperger’s Victoria
- Australian Network on Disability
- Autism Awareness Australia
- AutismSA
- EPIC Employment Service
- I CAN Network
- Jigsaw ( Fighting Chance)

**INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT**
- Andrew Williams
- Conrad Folscher
- Darien Judge
- David Smith
- Graeme Simion
- Michael Dobbie
- Mitch Levy
- Rach Ranton
- Robyn Brown
- Ruth Bonser
- Sam Castleman
- Shad Sears
## OUR LAST 12 MONTHS IN NUMBERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Cumulative To Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals fully talent and skills assessed ready for work opportunities.</td>
<td>481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>139</strong> People directly hired through programs.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-workers in business client organisations trained in diversity.</td>
<td>4,136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>986</strong> Applicants applied for one of our tailored programs and sourcing activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>501</strong> Individuals attended initial screening workshops.</td>
<td>665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>84</strong> Retention rate of autistic people employed.</td>
<td>358</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>96%</strong> Average to date: 95%</td>
<td>1,004</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Applicants applied for one of our tailored programs and sourcing activities. **501**

Individuals fully talent and skills assessed ready for work opportunities. **139**

Co-workers in business client organisations trained in diversity. **986**

People directly hired through programs. **84**
FINANCIAL STATEMENT

TOTAL INCOME

$1,386,871

- 76% Total gross from government grants
- 12% Total gross from other revenues
- 12% Total gross from goods or services

TOTAL EXPENSES

$1,574,939

- 69% Total expenses from employees
- 12% Total expenses other
- 31% Total expenses from other

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