

Diversity and Inclusion **Aspect** Working in Partnership

By Nadine Eulgem

March 2025





Aspect acknowledges the
Traditional Owners and
Custodians of Country
throughout Australia and
recognises their continuing
connection to the land, sea,
waterways and community.
We pay our respects to them and
their cultures; and to their Elders
past and present.

We welcome all Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander people
here with us today.

Statement of inclusion

Everybody is welcome here.

We want you to feel it is OK to be authentically yourself. Please let us know if there is anything we can do that helps to include you in the meeting. Everyone is welcome to use their own strategies to help them feel relaxed.



2 April 2025

Celebrating World Autism Understanding Day

Understanding starts with you #WAUD2025



World Autism Understanding Day (WAUD) is about more than awareness—it's about action.

In conversations with the Autistic community it became apparent that while awareness has grown, genuine understanding and meaningful support are still lacking.

This was further highlighted in recent research where one third (33%) of respondents do not know how to respond if someone told them they are Autistic and 41% said that they would not know how to support people on the autism spectrum*.

World Autism Understanding Day 2nd April 2025

- Understanding is the key to inclusion.
- Moved from “awareness” to “understanding”

Aspect asked Autistic people and parents what they want people to **know** about autism and what people can **say** or **do** to be supportive...

If you learn
I'm Autistic,
I would like
you to...

World Autism
Understanding
Day
2 April 2025



aspect.org.au/WAUD

Michael Theo
Aspect Autism
Consultant

- Or something like, "You're
always welcome here."

Introduction

- Aspect's **partnership approach** to fundraising (including GIW)
- To **collaborate with** and represent the interests of the Autistic and autism communities.
- A journey to a **collaborative** and **strengths based** approach with Autistic people
- Working in Partnership journey:
 - The process
 - Language
 - Events
 - Marketing Collateral
- All leading to **improved outcomes** and a good fit with the community we seek to support.



How we work

At Aspect, we exist to support and empower our participants to live the best life possible.

We work to understand people on the autism spectrum, from their perspective.

Our focus is on the strengths and interests of people on the autism spectrum.

Our solutions are evidence-informed.

Our supports are designed around each person and family, for every stage of life – from early childhood to transition into adulthood.



Aspect's Working in Partnership Model

- Disability Access and Inclusion Plan.
- Core Strategy - **Partner with people on the autism spectrum** in governance, research, service planning and service delivery.
- Empowering Autistic voices
- Our work more respectful and effective.
- Prioritise our commitment to inclusion and diversity.
- Fundamental element of our DNA.
- Our working in partnership model sits very well with donors especially those who also have a close autism connection.



Aspect Autistic Forums

Aspect Advisory Council

A group of seven Autistic people who provide independent advice to the Aspect Board and Aspect's Executive team on Aspect's governance.

In 2020, Aspect's Board welcomed its first Autistic board member Tori Haar, a founding member of Aspect's Advisory Council.

Think Tank

A remunerated group of adults on the autism spectrum who provide advice for Aspect on day-to-day autism practice.

Communications Working Group

Aspect Fundraising collaborates with an Autistic working group to develop respectful accurate messaging and encourages Autistic people to engage with fundraising activities.



Aspect Autism Friendly

- Working towards an Australia where Autistic people feel welcomed, understood, and included in all the spaces and places they need to access to live fulfilling lives.
- Most team members are Autistic
- Working in Partnership Officer



How we told our stories

Our fundraising focus was based on emotional connection and pity.

- Imagery
 - **Sad, struggling** children
- Language
 - What was lacking
 - Tragedy
- Focus on
 - Deficits
 - Suffering
 - Fixing/curing



Autistic community said...

- Excluded Autistic people from the narrative
- Ignored Autistic people's perspectives
- Didn't represent Autistic individuals authentically
- Framed autism as a **tragedy** and problems to be "fixed"
- Focused on deficits rather than strengths
- Used emotional appeal based on pity
- Images of distress with no hope
- Reinforced negative stereotypes
- Used language that emphasised what's lacking
- Created donor fatigue and a sense of hopelessness



The Balance

Balancing the message:

- How do we show **real needs** without reinforcing stigma?
- The tightrope: Avoiding harm while still inspiring support

Key Challenge:

- **We still need to show that support is needed!**
- People give when they feel emotionally connected

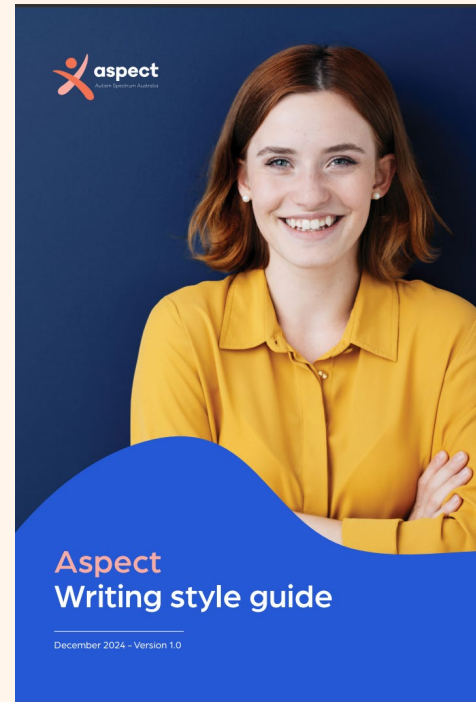
Goal:

- Shift narratives **without erasing real challenges**





Language

- Aspect language guide
- Shaped by the Autistic community
- Uses **respectful, person-centered** terminology
- Uses empowering language – i.e. support rather than save
- **Avoids** deficit-based framing
- Emphasises **strengths and challenges** equally
- Uses
- We use specific language within our appeals
- Used when we speak to GIW supporters
- Examples
 - Autism spectrum v's Autism Spectrum Disorder
 - Neuro-typical v's normal
- Evolving guide



The table below has been devised based on the findings from research¹

DO 	DON'T 
When talking about autism:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the autism spectrum on the autism spectrum developmental condition disability developmental disability neurodiversity neurodiversity affirming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Autism Spectrum Disorder or ASD Asperger's, Aspie special disease high/low-functioning autism has autism
When talking about people on the autism spectrum	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> person on the autism spectrum individual on the autism spectrum has a diagnosis of autism Autistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> person with autism diagnosed with autism person with ASD specific support needs
When talking about a person on the autism spectrum who may have a dual diagnosis	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> co-occurring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> co-morbidity
When talking about people not on the autism spectrum	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> neurotypical typically developing non-Autistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> normal
For young students and children, where we may not know what their preference is or where they have not yet decided	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> children or student on the autism spectrum 	
If it is not known how an adult would like their autism to be referred to, ask them what their preference is, and if in doubt	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Autistic person 	

The way we describe autism in the public domain may differ to the terms used by our researchers or medical professionals, who use terms defined in the DSM5 manual, which is used by clinicians to describe and diagnose autism.

The words 'autism' and 'spectrum' are not capitalised unless it is at the start of a sentence. Use a capital when referring to an Autistic person, Autistic community and non-Autistic people.

Some people have dual diagnosis of autism and attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) – they often refer to themselves as AuDHD.

Imagery

Shifting the narrative

- Empowerment
- Strength
- Inclusion

Strong imagery

- Authentic & respectful
- Empowering and positive
- Engaging
- Inclusive and diverse – representing the full spectrum



Training

- All staff receive fundraising autism **training**
- All agencies that we work with receive autism training
- Ensures everyone **understands autistic perspectives**
- Helps us **engage meaningfully** with donors & communities
- Better positions us for positive, inclusive messaging and engaging authentic strengths based story telling
- GIW training completed



Facts and figures about autism

Facts and statistics can lend authority to written materials or validate important points. This information sheet features key facts and figures which are supported by Aspect's researchers and can be used to highlight issues reported by the media.

**Our purpose
a different brilliant®**
Understanding, engaging
and celebrating the strengths,
interests and aspirations of people
on the autism spectrum.

Autism in Australia

- An estimated 1 in every 40 people in Australia is Autistic.¹
- Boys are three to four times more likely to be diagnosed with autism than girls.²

Support and services

- One-third of NDIS participants are Autistic.³

A recent Australian Bureau of Statistics survey⁴ of parents and carers found that among Autistic people:

- three-quarters need help with cognitive tasks or emotional support
- approximately half need help or supervision with communication and self-care
- 60% need help with mobility.

Autism and mental health

- Just over three-quarters of Autistic children have at least one mental health condition and nearly half have two or more mental health conditions.⁵
- About 45% of pre-school age Autistic children have one or more mental health conditions, in contrast to 14% of neurotypical youth (3–17 years) who have mental health conditions.⁵
- The most commonly reported co-occurring mental health diagnoses among Autistic people across the lifespan are anxiety (20%), sleep-wake disorders (13%), depressive disorders (11%), obsessive-compulsive disorder (9%), bipolar disorders (5%) and schizophrenia spectrum disorders (4%).⁶
- Autistic adults are more likely to experience suicidal thoughts than the general population.⁷

Events

- Aligns with working in partnership with Autistic people
- Event working group with Autistic representation
- Events designed with Autistic people in mind
- Authentic representation including Autistic speakers
- Key themes focusing on strengths and interests e.g. art, music, science, technology
- Collaborations with Autistic advocates
- Accommodations include:
 - Lighting, sound and sensory-friendly spaces
 - Quiet space
 - Visual Story – add picture
- A wonderful GIW supporter experience – educative, interesting, valuable, empowering



**A night at
the stadium:**
Visual Story



- Successful!

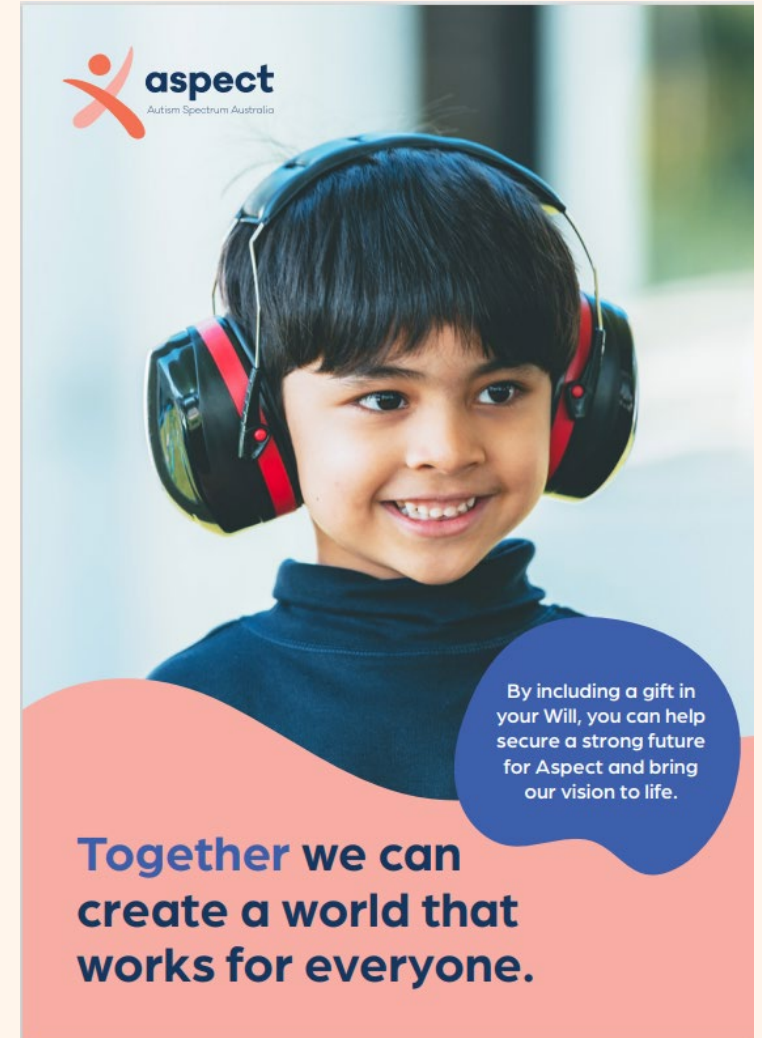
- Finalist 2024 - FIA Impact through Events Award category

New Value Proposition - Gifts in Wills

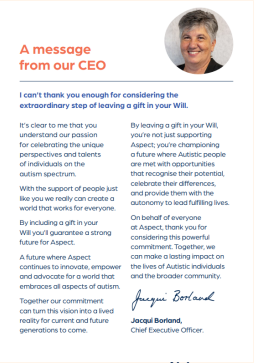
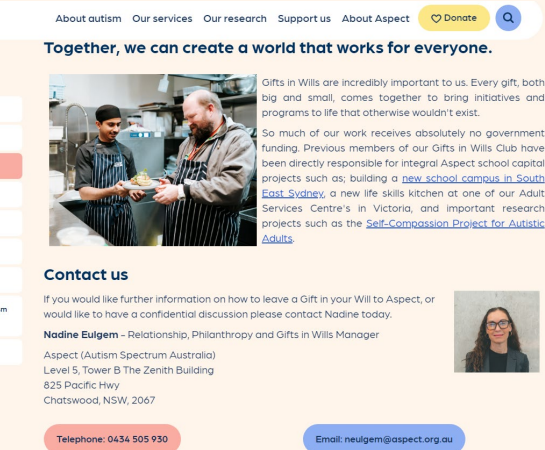
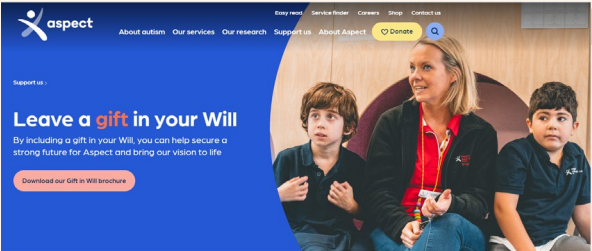
- Project completed last year
- Working in Partnership Officer was a key member of our development team
- Showcases real **empowering stories**
- Encourages legacy giving in a **respectful** way

What makes it different?

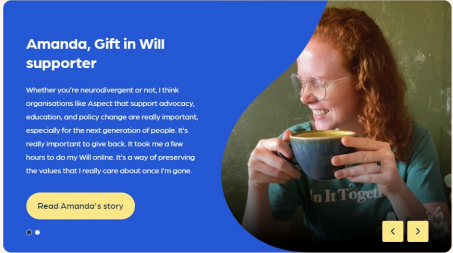
- **Language - Clear, strengths-based**
 - **Together** we can create a world that works for everyone
 - A world where Autistic people can live their life, their way, **every single day**
 - **Together**, we can make a lasting impact on the lives of Austistic individuals and the broader community
- **Imagery** - Authentic, diverse & strong
- **Stories** – empowering



New Brochure & Aspect landing page



Hear from two of our lovely Gifts in Wills supporters

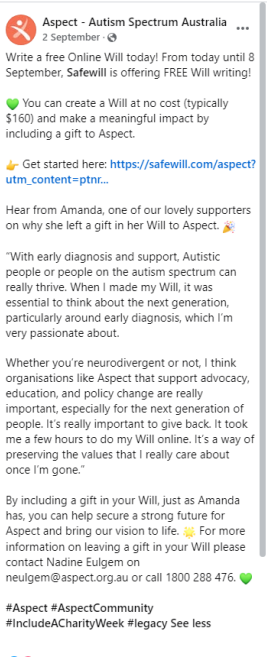
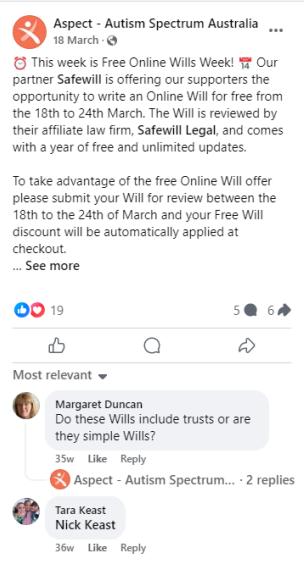


A Message from our CEO, Jacqui Borland

Social Media Posts



A world where Autistic people can live their life, their way, **every single day.**



Write your Will for free
18 - 24 March
safewill.com/aspect



Hear from one of our GIW supporters

“When I made my Will, it was essential to think about the next generation, particularly around early diagnosis, which I’m very passionate about. It’s really important to give back. It took me a few hours to do my Will online. It’s a way of preserving the values that I really care about once I’m gone.”

Amanda, Aspect Gifts in Wills supporter



Our shift

Working in partnership with Autistic people has transformed our fundraising.

- Our campaigns are – authentic, empowering and strengths-based.
- We **emotionally connect** without relying on pity or tragedy
- As many of our donors are **not Autistic** and may not fully understand challenges we **educate and focus on strengths**
- **Highlight potential, inclusion and empowerment**
- Needs-based can also be strengths-based
- Shifting the focus:
 - **From fixing the person to fixing the world around them**
 - Society should adapt to accommodate Autistic individuals
 - Telling better stories
 - Stories are accurate, positive and **empowering**



The outcome

Through our Working in Partnership model, we are continually working towards respectful representation of Autistic people in our campaigns.

Result:

- Autistic community comfortable with our fundraising appeals and content
- **Stronger** donor support and deeper engagement
- Greater support for initiatives that truly benefit the community
- When we put in the work, **we see positive change**



Thank
you

