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Thank You For Joining Us at the EMBRACE KIDS Screening!

A huge thank you to everyone who joined us over the weekend for our special screening of *Embrace Kids*! It was comforting to see our community come together to start important conversations about body image, self-acceptance, and kindness.

Body image continues to be one of the most significant challenges facing young people in Australia, impacting their confidence, self-esteem, and mental health. *Embrace Kids* provided a powerful and research-backed perspective on these issues, offering real stories and practical ways to support the young people in our lives.

We hope the film sparked meaningful discussions in your homes and communities. Remember, the journey to self-acceptance isn't one we take alone - let's continue to uplift and empower one another.

Thank you for being part of this movement toward a more positive future of belonging!

#EmbraceKids #CommunityCare #SelfAcceptance



For more resources or for free tools to continue these important conversations, visit theembracehub.com.

If you have any questions, need support, or want to share your thoughts on the film, feel free to reach out to hello@theembracecollective.org or email GRANN - we would love to hear from you!

Know someone who would benefit from these insights? Share your experience with them and invite them to sign up for more resources at bodyimageresources.com.

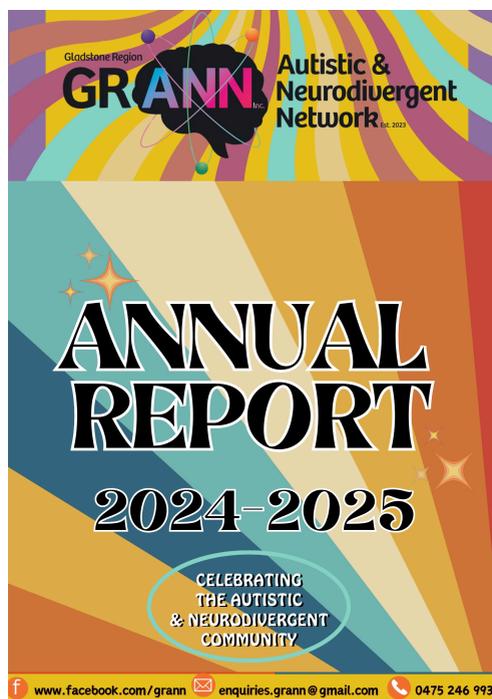
Let's keep working together to create a world where everybody feels confident in their own skin.

Thank You To All Who Attended Our AGM!

We extend our heartfelt thanks to everyone who joined us for the GRANN Annual General Meeting. Your support and participation are what keep our community strong and thriving!

A special thank you to our outgoing board members for their dedication and commitment over the past year. Your efforts in co-founding and shaping GRANN into a registered not-for-profit have laid the foundation for meaningful change in our region. We deeply appreciate the time and energy you have poured into this organisation and wish you all the best with your passions looking forward.

As GRANN steps into a new chapter, we're excited about the opportunities ahead. With a renewed vision and a growing network, we look forward to advocating, educating, and creating a community of belonging for Autistic and Otherwise Neurodivergent individuals in the Gladstone region, and as far as our reach may extend to.



A Message from GRANN

At GRANN, being neuro-affirming isn't just about supporting Neurodivergent people - it's about reshaping the way we understand human behaviour. It means embracing the full, messy, and brilliant spectrum of human experience, expression, and need. Dignity, respect, and autonomy aren't privileges; they are fundamental human rights.

Belonging isn't about compliance, and "normal" is nothing more than a construct designed to keep some people comfortable while expecting others to contort themselves into palatable versions of who they truly are. The truth is, when we stop pathologizing difference, we start honouring it. Instead of viewing sensory, emotional, or social divergence as something to fix, we shift our perspective; We become neuro-affirming.

Being neuro-affirming is about being human-affirming. It's about rejecting the notion that people should be easy, convenient, or predictable. We are layered. We are complex. We are wired in beautifully different ways, and that is where true connection lies. At its core, this is about building a world where all brains, all nervous systems, and all people are seen, valued, and supported - just as they are.

Because affirming difference isn't just about acceptance. It's about justice.

In solidarity,
The Collaborators @ GRANN

Here's to another year of connection and impact!

#GRANN #NeurodivergentCommunity #BeyondAwareness

LOOKING AHEAD TO APRIL

World Autism Day: #BeyondAwareness #BeyondTokenism

World Autism Day, April 2nd



April 2nd marks another World Autism Day, a day when blue lights flicker on landmarks, fundraising campaigns roll out, and social media fills with hashtags about “acceptance” and “understanding.” But for many Autistic people, this day - and Autism Awareness Month as a whole - feels like another round of performative gestures rather than meaningful change.

Following Neurodiversity Celebration Week, which often brings a flurry of corporate statements and awareness events, World Autism Day tends to follow a similar, predictable pattern: sanctimonious fundraising efforts, social skills workshops designed to make Autistic people “fit in,” behaviour “supports” that aim to suppress our natural traits, and temporary accommodations that disappear as soon as the spotlight moves on. Tokenistic slogans, cupcakes, and colourful branding do little to address the real, systemic barriers autistic people face every day.

“Every year, they celebrate us with slogans and cupcakes, but when we ask for real inclusion, we’re met with excuses and half-measures. It’s time to move beyond token gestures.” - Local Gladstone Neuro-Affirming professional.

We Need Action, Not Just Awareness

The reality is, while awareness has grown, actual inclusion and support remain frustratingly stagnant. Autistic people are still spoken *about* in boardrooms, councils, networking spaces, and government discussions rather than being meaningfully included. Decisions are made on our behalf without our voices

truly represented at the table. When we are given a seat, it's often for optics rather than influence - our presence is acknowledged, but our input is diluted into toothless policies that lack real action or enforceable change. Our experiences are debated in policy circles, yet when we advocate for ourselves, we are met with performative gestures and vague commitments that fail to translate into tangible improvements.

We are celebrated in curated social media posts, but in real life, we are denied jobs due to rigid and biased hiring practices, indoctrinated into the act of masking in educational and professional settings, and left to fight for basic accommodations that should be a given. Too often, we are left to rely on government-funded schemes that offer businesses financial incentives to hire us- treating our employment as a charitable act rather than a recognition of our skills. Meanwhile, disability initiatives, as well intentioned as they may be, frequently reinforce stigma, failing to provide true autonomy or self-determination in our careers and lives.

“Businesses get paid to ‘include’ us, but where’s the accountability? We deserve jobs based on our skills, not because of a government bribe. We need autonomy, not pity.” - Local Gladstone Autistic & Neurodivergent community member.

The Irony of This Year’s Theme: Colour

This year, World Autism Day’s theme is ‘Colour’ - a concept meant to symbolize diversity, vibrancy, and the richness of Autistic experiences. Yet, in practice, the full spectrum of our community is often ignored. The intersectionality of Autism - how race, gender, class, disability, and other identities shape Autistic experience - is rarely acknowledged in mainstream conversations.

Autistic people of colour, LGBTQIA+ Autistics, and non-speaking Autistics are still marginalized within an already overlooked community. Our authentic, colourful selves are celebrated in marketing campaigns but often excluded from decision-making spaces. We are encouraged to “be ourselves,” but only in ways that are palatable to neuronormative society.





Beyond Awareness: What Needs to Change?

If organisations, institutions, and policymakers truly want to support Autistic people, they must move beyond self-gratifying awareness campaigns and towards real, systemic change:

- ✓ **Nothing About Us, Without Us** – Autistic people must be at the center of conversations about Autism. Representation on decision-making boards, councils, and advisory panels must be meaningful, not tokenistic.

- ✓ **End Compliance-Based “Support”** – Social skills training and behaviour interventions that aim to make Autistic people appear more neuronormative should be replaced with supports that respect our natural ways of communicating, thinking, and engaging with the world. A support system shifting perspectives to curiosity.

- ✓ **Permanent, Not Temporary, Accommodations** – Accessibility shouldn’t be an exception granted during awareness campaigns. Workplaces, schools, and public spaces need to embed inclusive practices year-round - This goes beyond adding a "quiet" room or providing fidget toys, it includes addressing attitudes and misconceptions.

- ✓ **Address the Gaps in Services and Support** – Many Autistic people still struggle to access healthcare, employment, education, and social services due to bureaucratic barriers and systemic discrimination. Addressing these issues should be a priority over PR-friendly campaigns.

- ✓ **Move Beyond Awareness to Advocacy** – It’s not enough to “raise awareness” if nothing changes. True allyship means advocating for policy changes, calling out discrimination, and actively working to remove systemic barriers.

“Neurodiversity shouldn’t be a marketing trend. We don’t need another awareness campaign—we need real change. Give us jobs, accessibility, and policies that actually mean something.” - Local Gladstone Neurodiversity advocate.

What Will You Do?

So, as World Autism Day approaches, the question isn’t whether you will wear blue, share a hashtag, or attend a fundraiser - it’s what you will do to ensure that Autistic people are heard, valued, and supported long after April 2nd.

Will you challenge ableism in your workplace?

Will you push for inclusive hiring practices?

Will you support Autistic-led initiatives?

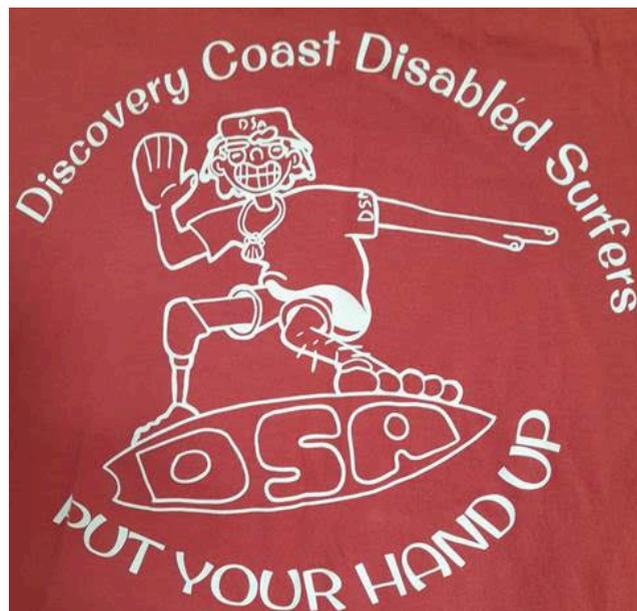
Will you amplify the voices of autistic advocates instead of speaking over them?

Will you spark conversations with curiosity?

All Autistic people deserve more than one day of recognition - we deserve a society that respects and creates belonging for us every day of the year. This includes recognising your right to celebrate however *you* choose; In 2025, this is the lens in which GRANN views World Autism Day.

“We are praised for our “unique perspectives,” yet reprimanded when those perspectives challenge the status quo.”- Local Gladstone Autistic & Neurodivergent community member.

***#Neurodiversity #RealChangeMatters #InclusionNow
#Belonging***



DISCOVERY COAST DISABLED SURFERS

APRIL 5TH 2025

Volunteers: 8am “ We Need You”

Participants: 9am “ All welcome “

You will need your swimmers & a hat.

Discovery Coast will supply sunscreen, rash vests & water.

IF YOU HAVE A FEW HOURS ON SATURDAY MORNING COME
VOLUNTEER & HELP PUT “ SMILES ON DIALS “

AGNES WATER SIGN ON AT TOM JEFFERY MEMORIAL PARK

*DISCOVERY COAST DISABLED SURFERS FACILTATE A FREE - SAFE,
NURTURING OPEN WATER / SURF EXPERIENCE FOR DISABLED
COMMUNITY MEMBERS FROM FRASER COAST TO ROCKHAMPTON*

BBQ LUNCH PROVIDED FOR ALL ATTENDING.

Discovery Coast Disabled Surfers.

Contact Daffy: [041487 6874](tel:0414876874)

daffyshortnsport@gmail.com



**DON'T FORGET TO GET YOUR TICKETS TO
CAMP QUALITY'S 'BIG PARTY' PUPPETRY
FUN!**

Most of us will be touched by cancer at some point in our lives. It can be scary and confusing – especially for kids.

Camp Quality’s Cancer Education Program is there to inform young children about cancer, bust cancer myths and teach the whole community that “you can’t catch cancer!”

Tuesday, April 15
2:00 p.m.- 2:30 p.m. AEST
Online via MS Teams

View the show online to help:

Reduce bullying

Reduce absenteeism

Promote mental wellbeing for kids after cancer treatment

Support any child facing a cancer diagnosis in the family.

Get your tickets via the Humanitix link below or the QR Code above:

<https://events.humanitix.com/grann-and-camp-quality-big-party-puppetry-fun/tickets>



Learn more about Camp Quality, their positive impact on the Australian community, and the programs they offer, or book a puppetry show for your school via the following link: <https://www.campquality.org.au>



Website in Progress!

We're working on creating our website to house all of GRANN's resources in one accessible place. This will be a hub for information, support, and community connections.

We're looking forward to sharing insights, resources, and community perspectives in more interactive and accessible formats.

So stay tuned - we'll share the links soon so you can follow along and continue the journey with us!

We'd love your input!

If you have time, skills, or ideas to share and would like to contribute to GRANN, we'd love to hear from you - reach out and get involved!

Share Your News with GRANN!

Do you have something to share with the GRANN community? We're always looking for contributions for our newsletter! Whether it's an upcoming event, a personal story, or important updates, we'd love to include it.

Send your suggestions or anything you would like to share to the contact details below- we can't wait to hear from you! Let's keep our community informed and connected!

Gladstone Region Autistic & Neurodivergent Network Inc.

enquiries.grann@gmail.com

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