

Celebrating Neurodiversity in Scouting

Being in Scouting can be life changing for any child, especially one with especially one with a disability or additional needs. The following stories tell how five members (and their families) found their place in Scouts and the successes (and challenges) they experienced.

Scouting has a long history of including young people on the Autism spectrum and we are always working to increase awareness among our members, often through communication and training. Many of our volunteers start their journey in Scouts without an understanding of Autism, so to help that journey, Scouts Victoria has partnered with key agencies like Statewide Autistic Services Inc

Chris

Chris joined Cubs in 2008 aged eight years and five months. He was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome just over a year later. Since then he has continued on in Scouting and joined Rovers in 2017.

Chris' time in Scouting hasn't been challenge free. They encountered a Leader who didn't understand Asperger's and his needs and wasn't willing to. He was even denied his Queen's Scout award. However, determination prevailed and he was eventually awarded it.

Regardless of this, Chris' family cannot speak highly enough of what Scouting has done for their son. The confidence it has encouraged is unbelievable, allowing him to feel comfortable enough to run his Group's recent ARAP night with a fellow Rover. He also currently holds down a job

(SASI) to run training additional to our eLearning and Wood Badge program. In 2019, four half day courses were run, with access for our Regional Scouting communities a priority. The plans for 2020 are still in development, but we are looking at adding an additional element to our training. Extending the training from a half day, to a full day and giving participants more opportunities to try their skills. Keep an eye on our social media and for Leaders, the weekly 'Be Informed' for updates. We're also arranging presentations in other areas that link to working with young people on the Autism spectrum, such as sessions on ADHD or sensory spaces, so keep an eye out for these in the new year as well.

as a stable hand and is looking to become an Ambulance Community Officer with Ambulance Victoria. Both they see as a testament to the skills Scouting has given Chris.

Chris has earned a variety of certificates including First Aid and Open Water Diving, and has been recognised in his community numerous times including receiving the Australian Government Volunteer Award. He was nominated for this by the family's local newsagent.

Chris' success in Scouting has encouraged his family to join in too. His sister is currently half way through her badge work for the Queen's Scout award, his mother has been an Adult Helper and Committee member for 11 years and his father has been a Scout Leader for almost six years.

Since joining Rovers, Chris has completed 177 hours service and we can't wait to see what he will achieve next!



Brandon

Everyone needs somewhere they can belong, and when you have the social barriers that come with autism this can be difficult. When Brandon's family saw a local Scout Group running a barbecue at the local market they wondered if Scouting could become Brandon's place to belong. Years later, they tell us the answer was Yes!

Brandon struggled at school but has thrived at Scouts where the skills were practical and, while busying himself with badge work and going on camps, he developed the skills to connect with others.

Scouting has played a big part in shaping the Brandon his family know today. From sitting on the sidelines at Joeys, to become the first recipient of the Grey Wolf award in his Group in more than three years, Scouting has allowed him to build character and has supported him through personal growth.

Seeing Brandon be nurtured and guided by dedicated Leaders encouraged his mother, Angela, to make the decision to become a Leader herself. She is now a very proud Mum, running a Joey Mob and helping other children to get as much out of Scouting as her son has. To quote Angela "It seems Scouting has given us both a place to truly belong!"

Tips for making your Group a safe space for members on the Autism Spectrum (and a great for all youth too).



The Adams Family

Sue and Russell met through Scouting when they were both Rovers and continued on as Leaders so it wasn't a question that their three sons would join Joeys once they were old enough. The boys had lots of fun and adventure but over time, all three receiving diagnoses on the Autism spectrum. This didn't stop them from enjoying everything Scouting had to offer, with all three continuing through into Rovers.

The journey each son had however was different. They all found Joeys, for the



most part, complication free, made easier by the fact their mother was there as a Leader and could "interpret the weird bits". One son, who had a carer at Cubs and Scouts, saw only a few hiccups. Venturers posed the biggest challenge. Finding a good fit can be tricky, and meant a couple of visits at different Units and some travelling. Two of the boys were able to find their place at the local Rover Crew but one needed more support. The local Crew tried to help but were honest enough to say they couldn't provide the support necessary for this to be his place. He has now found a home with special needs Group, Manningham Tende Beck. Turns out it was home for his Mum too who joined as a Leader.

Two of the boys achieved their Queen's Scout awards with the help and support of their Leaders and family. Unfortunately the other struggled with public presentations, an integral part of the award. The family recommend anyone else in that situation speak up early. You can then arrange alternatives to any areas that are a problem so everyone can achieve! The work he did put in, however, can be used for the Duke of



Edinburgh Award so he is now looking to earn this.

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Tips for making your Group a safe space for members on the Autism Spectrum (and everyone else too).

Clear and simple communication

- Ensure you have their attention before you speak e.g. use their name "Robert, the next activity will start in five minutes".
- Try to not complicate instructions with too many words.
- Reduce open ended questions, clarify and reflect back.
- Be direct, clear and literal – say what you mean and avoid sarcasm or sayings.
- Warn of any upcoming changes in routine e.g email to families with this week's plans.
- Try not to shout – young people may not understand why people are shouting and can find it distressing regardless of having Autism or not.
- Remember some ASD and ADD/ADHD young people are hypersensitive to noise.
- Be visual – get creative and use pictures, symbols and actions to highlight communication.
- Practical demonstrations will appeal more to all your Scouts.

Allow time, provide structure, routine and predictability

- Give your Scouts time to process information and instructions.
- Be patient.
- Visual calendars and programs for the nights help.
- Explain what is happening now and next.
- Have a buddy who can give extra guidance and reassurance.
- Be prepared and plan ahead .

Give clear rules and expectations

- Help and remind the young person what is expected of them and the rules they need to follow. Having these presented visually helps.
- Work with the family to know what social goals they might be working on at home or school and seeing where Scouting can link into these.
- Delegate specific tasks to the young person e.g. "Camel Patrol – you're on dinner clean up. Robert, you will use the tea towel and dry the washing up".
- Be alert for anxiety and warning signs of meltdowns – try de-escalation before meltdowns occur.

- Work with families to know the triggers for your members.
- Things will go wrong, everyone stuff up. Have restorative conversations, remind what you expect next time. Review the rules as needed.
- Reward appropriate behaviour.
- Don't take poor behaviour personally.
- Punishments will not always create learning, and especially if there is any time gap between the issue and the punishment. Consequences of the action can be enough. E.g. After a tent full of mozzies, you'll never forget the importance of zipping up the fly!

Consider the environment

- Warn Scouts in advance of environments that might be a trigger e.g: a Scout with hypersensitivity to noise might need warning in advance of the Joey visit or Scouts who don't cope in crowds might need a plan for the visit to the local show e.g. "next week Robert, we are going to a very busy place, but you can walk by my side the whole time".
- Consider tools like a time out card or time out space.