



Sylvia Rodger Academy

Governance Program 2019

Executive Summary

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Dr Olivia Gatfield

January 2021



AutismCRC



Australian Government
Department of Industry, Science,
Energy and Resources

AusIndustry
Cooperative Research
Centres Program

The Sylvia Rodger Academy is an initiative of the Autism CRC, which receives funding from the Australian Government

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ISBN for full report: 978-1-922365-23-1

Citation: Bartz, A. & Gatfield, O (2021). Governance Program 2019: Evaluation report. Brisbane: Autism CRC Ltd.

Copies of this report can be downloaded from the Autism CRC website autismcrc.com.au.

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Acknowledgements

The Sylvia Rodger Academy would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land throughout Australia. We also wish to pay respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

The authors acknowledge the financial support of the Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC), established and supported under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centre Program. The authors also acknowledge the organisations who provided Board observer placements to our participants.

The authors wish to thank the Project Team, without whom the development and delivery of the Program would not have been possible. The Project Team were:

- Ashton Bartz
- Judy Brewer
- Malcolm Mayfield
- Dr Olivia Gatfield
- Peter Davey
- Rachel McNamara
- Dr Shirley Lanning



Above L-R: Malcolm Mayfield, Dr Olivia Gatfield, Dr Shirley Lanning, Ashton Bartz, Peter Davey & Rachel McNamara.

Insert: Judy Brewer

The authors would also like to thank the 14 passionate and talented participants for being a part of the inaugural Governance Program.



The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC)

The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC) is the world's first national, cooperative research effort focused on autism. Taking a whole-of-life approach to autism focusing on diagnosis, education and adult life, Autism CRC researchers are working with end-users to provide evidence-based outcomes which can be translated into practical solutions for governments, service providers, education and health professionals, families and people on the autism spectrum.

The Sylvia Rodger Academy is an initiative of Autism CRC. The Academy delivers nationwide programs aimed at empowering autistic adults. Its vision is to see autistic people thriving through discovering and using their strengths.

autismcrc.com.au

A note on terminology

We recognise that when referring to individuals on the autism spectrum, there is no one term that suits all people. In our published material and other work, when speaking of adults we use the terms 'autistic person', 'person on the autism spectrum' or 'person on the spectrum'. The term 'autistic person' uses identity first language, which reflects the belief that being autistic is a core part of a person's identity.

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is diagnostic terminology used by the healthcare sector, and is used in the context of a person being 'diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder'.



1. Background

The Governance Program is the first national training program in corporate governance for autistic adults, enabling leadership in decision-making and capturing the strength of diverse thinking to make a broader contribution to the corporate and government sectors.

The Governance Program was created and launched in 2019, with our pilot Program running from late 2019 to late 2020. The Program was co-designed and co-delivered with autistic adults, with four of the seven Project Team members identifying as autistic. Following an open application process, 15 applications were accepted from autistic adults aged 25 to 59 to participate in the 2019 Program, with 14 of those applicants completing the program.

2. Objective and Governance

The objectives of the Program were to:

- increase the engagement of autistic adults in organisational decision-making
- establish a national network of autistic people with governance skills, enabling them to share experiences and opportunities
- provide participants with practical knowledge and experience and develop skills
- improve participants' understanding of governance structures and different organisational models.

To ensure the Program met these objectives, development and delivery was undertaken by a majority autistic Project Team, most of whom had extensive corporate governance experience.

3. Program Elements

The elements of the Program included:

- Five **online training modules** delivered in a custom built e-learning platform which were written by an autistic Project Team member with significant corporate governance experience. Engagement and learning was supported by running fortnightly online sessions hosted by members of the Project Team, with a total of five online sessions held.
- A **3.5-day residential workshop** held in Melbourne. The workshop extended the theory learned in the online modules and enabled participants to learn about, and practice, corporate governance skills.



- A **board observation** with organisations in Autism CRC's network. Participants were also provided with a reflection task to complete after their board observation to consolidate their learning.

To support participants' wellbeing throughout the Program, a **Preparation and Wellbeing Toolkit** was developed.

4. Evaluation Description

The participants for evaluation were autistic adults who participated in the Program (n=14). The method for evaluation was two fit-for-purpose surveys, administered through Qualtrics.

5. Summary of Findings

Participants rated the Program overall as 'excellent' (n=7) and would recommend the Governance Program to other autistic adults. Participants who recorded additional comments discussed their achievements since completing the Governance Program, or discussed ways in which the Program had otherwise benefited them. Some participants (n=4) noted that they had an increase in confidence following graduation from the Governance Program.

With regard to specific program elements:

- **Online modules:** participants (n=10) rated the online modules as either 'okay' (n=1), 'good' (n=1), or 'excellent' (n=7), with one participant leaving the question blank (n=1). All participants indicated that having modules prior to the workshop was 'helpful'.
- **Preparation and Wellbeing Toolkit:** participants (n=10) read 'some' (n=8) or 'all' (n=2) of the toolkit, with the majority completing 'some' or 'all' of the toolkit (n=7), and indicating it as useful (n=7).
- **Residential Workshop:** all participants (n=10) thought the workshop was 'good' (n=1) or 'excellent' (n=9), with the most common rating for individual sessions being 'excellent'.
- **Board observation and reflection task:** the Program participants (n=7) rated the board observations as 'good' (n=1), or 'excellent' (n=6). Of the survey participants that engaged in the board observation reflection task (n=6), this was rated as 'good' (n=2), or 'excellent' (n=4).



6. Evaluation Outcomes

The evaluation data indicated that the delivery of Australia's first holistic corporate Governance Program for autistic adults was hugely successful. The evaluation data indicates that each Program objective has been met. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive.

As this is the inaugural Governance Program, it would be helpful to complete a one year follow up with Program participants.

What an amazing opportunity that helps to highlight some of the strengths that individuals who happen to be autistic have. Thanks.





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