

Introductions:

Jacob Alan

Jacob is a passionate advocate for neurodiversity in employment, **focusing on significance, individualization and futuristic** approaches for better ROI, Jacob is a **maximizer**.

Despite diagnosis of Aspergers, ADHD, Infantile Epilepsy, and Tourette's, received at age 5 following a stroke, Jacob's diverse background ranges from Labouring, Warehousing, Gardening, and Bakery Management and Social entrepreneurship. He holds qualifications in Baking and Patisseries, Hospitality and Leadership Management.

As the Employment Projects Manager at Aspergers Victoria, Jacob combines personal experiences and social enterprise understandings to address employment challenges for neurodiverse individuals. He speaks to the importance of inclusive workplaces, drawing from his own journey of resilience and self-confidence.

Having never disclosed his neurodiversity in his career development, until joining AV, Jacob prioritises merit-based achievements and challenges the status quo with non-traditional approaches. He navigates challenges openly, leveraging his strengths and fostering understanding in the workplace. Jacob's authenticity has earned him respect, and his journey with Aspergers Victoria has allowed him to advocate for neurodiversity more openly, sharing his strengths and vulnerabilities along the way.

Verity Thornton

Verity, a Change and Business Analyst at ANZ for nearly 9 years, champions neurodiversity in the workplace. Her dedication to fostering inclusivity shines through her involvement with Aspergers Victoria and other organisations, reflecting her commitment to understanding.

As the Engagement Lead for Wired Differently and ANZ's Neurodiversity Employee Network, Verity advocates for neurodiverse individuals within the company. Her coordination of ANZ work placements for the Teens Work KnowHow Program demonstrates her commitment to empowering the next generation.

Aspergers Victoria extends heartfelt thanks to Verity for her invaluable contributions to the Teens Work KnowHow Program. Her dedication has made a significant difference in the lives of neurodiverse youth, providing them with invaluable work experiences.

Collaborating with fellow Aspies like Verity brings a unique depth to our work. Our shared understanding of neurodiversity allows for seamless communication and a deeper level of empathy. Working alongside someone who truly comprehends your experiences enables us to make more impactful decisions and drive meaningful change within our community.

Leslie Clements

Leslie is a dynamic leader renowned for her strategic prowess and commitment to organisational change. In her role as General Manager at Aspergers Victoria (AV), Leslie has demonstrated excellence in financial management, strategic planning, and stakeholder engagement.

Driven by a passion for diversity and inclusion, Leslie spearheads initiatives to ensure that every member of the Aspergers/autistic community feels supported, included, and understood. Her dedication to AV's mission has been instrumental in driving positive change and fostering a culture of belonging.

Beyond her professional achievements, Leslie brings a unique perspective to her role, drawing on her personal experiences as a parent of children on the autism spectrum. Through her firsthand encounters, she deeply understands the challenges and triumphs of individuals and families within the neurodiverse community.

Leslie's advocacy extends beyond the walls of AV, as she actively engages in community initiatives to promote awareness and acceptance of neurodiversity. Her unwavering commitment to empowering individuals and advocating for inclusivity makes her a respected leader and catalyst for positive change.

Mia Stovell

Mia is a placement student currently working with Aspergers Victoria, with a late diagnosis of ADHD. She has a personal understanding of the challenges neurodiverse women face as being underrepresented in conjunction with the more apparent traits observed in males.

Mia has a passion for creating inclusive environments where every individual is valued for their unique strengths, and brings a personal understanding of the challenges faced by neurodiverse individuals.

Currently pursuing a double degree in social work and psychology, Mia actively promotes inclusivity and diversity in both academic and professional settings. Her academic pursuits provide them with a comprehensive understanding of the psychological and social factors that influence neurodiverse individuals, allowing her to advocate effectively for their needs.

Mia works as a teacher's aide in a primary school. In this role, she works closely with neurodiverse children, providing support and guidance tailored to their individual needs. Through their hands-on experience in the classroom, Mia gains valuable insights into the unique challenges faced by neurodiverse individuals in educational settings, further informing her advocacy efforts.

Michelle Ridsdale

Michelle, Founder of Kaboose, is deeply involved in supporting the autistic and neurodiverse community. Her journey with Aspergers Victoria (AV) reflects her commitment to empowering individuals within the community.

As a former AV Job Coach, Michelle's hands-on experience equips her with a profound understanding of the challenges faced by neurodiverse individuals. She offers guidance and support as they navigate the complexities of the workforce.

Michelle's tenure as a former Board Member of Aspergers Victoria underscores her dedication to the cause. She played a pivotal role in shaping AV's initiatives, ensuring they remained responsive to the community's needs.

Now, as the Founder of Kaboose, Michelle continues her mission to enhance mental health and connectedness within the neurodiverse community. Through Kaboose, she fosters friendships and hopes to create employment opportunities, embodying the values championed by Aspergers Victoria.

Aaron Chen

Aaron's introduction to ANZ via the DXC Dandelion Program's collaboration with ANZ's Spectrum Program marked the beginning of his professional journey. Since 2018, Aaron has cultivated invaluable skills and forged meaningful relationships at ANZ, benefiting from the program's support and opportunities.

With a background in programming, data organisation, and analysis, Aaron seamlessly transitioned to ANZ's Cloud Enablement team through their Tech Talent Marketplace initiative. His expertise and dedication have made him a valued member of the team.

As an ANZ employee, Aaron is committed to advocating for individuals on the Spectrum, like himself. He encourages them to seek out support groups for work opportunities and experiences, believing in the power of community and collaboration to navigate the complexities of the workforce.

Driven by his own experiences and a desire to make a difference, Aaron is passionate about fostering inclusivity and support within ANZ and beyond. He exemplifies resilience and determination, inspiring others to embrace their unique talents and strengths.

Andrew Baird

Andrew serves as ANZ's Program Manager for the autism employment initiative, the ANZ Spectrum Program, launched in 2018. Additionally, he co-chairs the ANZ Neurodiversity Employee Network. Passionate about fostering diversity, Andrew plays a pivotal role in talent programs like Spectrum, Graduates & Interns, and Return to Work.

In his senior position at ANZ, Andrew oversees various talent programs, including Traineeships and Work Experience for autistic secondary students. He is dedicated to nurturing diverse talent within ANZ's Early Talent Programs, with the Spectrum Program as a cornerstone. Andrew is a supportive leader, invested in the growth and development of his team members.

Throughout his career, Andrew has demonstrated versatility, working across different areas of technology and business divisions within ANZ. His commitment to inclusivity and talent development underscores his leadership approach, making a positive impact within ANZ and beyond.

Andrew's passion for diversity extends beyond the workplace; he actively engages with community initiatives to promote neurodiversity awareness and inclusion. As a champion for change, Andrew advocates for creating environments where everyone, regardless of neurodiversity, can thrive and contribute to society.

