



Media Release – August 2019

WA Autism Symposium Drawcard for Expert Talent

Western Australia's remoteness is no match for small Fremantle based not-for-profit Autism West. For its fifth annual conference, the innovative community organisation has secured experts in the field otherwise not accessible to its delegates. The national autism conference provides the only annual opportunity in Australia for anyone with an interest in autism to listen, learn and network.

Professor Lyn Beazley AO, 2015 West Australian of the Year and former Chief Scientist for Western Australia, is one of many delegates looking forward to listening to experts in the field of autism present the latest information on diagnosis, research, behaviour management and lived experience.

"This Symposium is an important date in the calendar for all those with an interest in autism, whether as someone living with autism, a parent, educator, health professional or researcher. As Goodwill Ambassador for Autism West I am passionate in shining a light on the important work done in this field", Professor Beazley said.

The increasing spotlight on autism, coupled with a rise in diagnosis, has resulted in a spike in interest in topics such as employment opportunities and advocacy. The recent multi-award winning ABC documentary series *Employable Me* highlighted the diverse skills and abilities of the extraordinary job seekers interviewed by Series Director Cian O'Clery, who is attending this year's Symposium as a speaker.

"*Employable Me* gave me some understanding of the challenges faced by many people living with autism and how few opportunities there are for them to be heard and truly listened to", Cian said.

The series refers to 'neurodiversity', the new buzz word often used to lift the stigma applied to individuals with autism and other neurological conditions, but few know the history behind the term. Meet Judy Singer, an Australian sociologist who describes herself as a woman "in the middle of 3 generations of women somewhere on the autistic spectrum". Judy coined the term neurodiversity in the late 1990s on joining online autism self-advocacy groups and discovering how much we all see, hear, feel and sort information in different ways.

"When I was growing up, we thought children were born as blank slates that parents could write on. When my daughter was born, I had to revise my thinking," Judy Singer says. "I coined the term 'neurodiversity' to add to the intersections of gender, ethnicity, class and disability. My hope was that a neurodiversity movement following in the footsteps of the women's and gay movements would right the wrongs done to neurological minorities."

The Symposium provides a platform for new ideas, robust discussion and learning, and is a unique event in Western Australia open to anyone with an interest in autism, its challenges and opportunities.

"We are proud to host an event of this calibre in WA", said Louise Sheehy, Autism West's CEO. "Together with home grown talent such as Professor Andrew Whitehouse, we also attract national and international expert speakers. The event is designed to inform and educate, but also challenge our thinking, how to focus on abilities to overcome challenges, and how to work towards a society where autism is just a part of our community's rich fabric. With the generous support of Lotterywest we have also able to offer a limited number of subsidised tickets to metro and regional families."

Autism West Symposium

Date: 1-2 November 2019

Venue: Pan Pacific Perth, 207 Adelaide Tce, Perth WA 6000

How to book: <https://www.trybooking.com/BBQWS>

Keynote speakers:

Andrew Whitehouse

Emma Goodall

Judy Singer

Payam with Parisa Khosravi

Wenn Lawson

For a full list of speakers, topics and how to access subsidised and concession tickets, visit

<http://autismwest.org.au/event/2019-autism-west-symposium/>

For interviews, images and more information please contact Helene Hansen on events@autismwest.org.au or on mobile 0401 254 696.