First Nations People Framework

positive partnerships

Working together to support school-aged students on the autism spectrum

Acknowledgement

> "Positive Partnerships acknowledges and pays respects to the Traditional Custodians and Elders of this land and the continuation of their cultural, spiritual and educational practices."

We at Positive Partnerships value and recognise the diversity of First Nations cultures and heritage and its proud part in Australia's national identity. We acknowledge and continue to learn about Australia's colonial history and the past and ongoing impacts on Australia's First Nations peoples. We believe in and strongly support the truth telling of Australia's colonial history and as a Nation we must encourage open, honest dialogue and build relationships founded on respect and trust.

Meet the artists

Leticia Anne Designs & Co brings together a diverse team of deadly creatives and mentors to support, embrace and empower First Nations businesses, young entrepreneurs and organisations focused on community growth and development.

Leticia is a proud Wiradyuri 'Yinaa' (woman) who grew up in Dubbo, with ancestral lines stemming from Narrandera. She now resides on beautiful Darkinjung Country on the Central Coast. Leticia uses her resilience built from childhood trauma and growing up in foster care to transform not only her own life, but the lives of other children and young people. She has been a Youth Worker and consultant for over 8 years, and the proud business owner and creator of Leticia Anne Designs & Co since March 2020. Leticia has developed her own creative style and harnesses her passion for bringing stories, visions and opportunities to life for Aboriginal people, business owners and organisations through branding and design services.

Lauren who is the creator of the cultural illustration designs for Positive Partnerships, is a proud Wodi Wodi and Walbunja person from the Yuin Nation on the South Coast of NSW. Lauren uses artworks as a medium to tell stories and to connect those around them to dig deeper in their learnings of First Nations culture. Lauren has been a part of the Leticia Anne Designs & Co team since 2021.

Our business

The following Framework was developed by Positive Partnerships. Positive Partnerships is committed to working with First Nations communities and making a positive difference to First Nations autistic school aged children, families and communities.

Positive Partnerships is a national project funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, through the Helping Children with Autism program. We're delivered by Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect).

We work in partnership with families, educators and communities to strengthen positive outcomes for young people on the autism spectrum. We create connections and opportunities for an inclusive culture where autistic students belong and thrive.

We deliver high quality professional learning and resources through workshops, webinars and online modules for parents, carers and school staff. This strengthens their capacity to support and advocate for young people on the autism spectrum.

Children from all backgrounds, countries and levels of society can be diagnosed on the autism spectrum. Current data shows that autism is under-diagnosed among First Nations communities. First Nations people experience disability at a rate 1.5 times that of the general Australian population and are twice as likely to have a severe or profound form of disability (Bailey & Arciuli, 2020).

"Whilst First Nations people with disability express high aspirations for education, statistical data on educational outcomes show that these aspirations remain unfulfilled. Population wide, First Nations people with disability attain educational outcomes at half the rate of First Nations people without disability" (Avery & FPDN, 2018)

Preface

Since I was a baby, my family led by my dad would take me out to country. I would practice a lot of culture with my dad going out to country, learning how to hunt and learning. But for me there wasn't language of this is the Aboriginal way, but rather - this is the way. There wasn't really comparison of white / 'blak' way. I just more saw it as how me and my dad connect, and my reset.

Out in nature I felt not just connection but a feeling of oneness. I was present, with the birds, the trees, the soil, the water, the sky. Everything in all its wholeness as a completely different species, perfect in its purpose of existence.

I would return to Narm/Melbourne which was a 6hr journey, to what felt like the culture shock despite how much time I spent indoctrinated into it I never felt like I belonged. The constant prompting of how to be, and comparison of what a good colonised girl looked like, - Elise sit still, I'm talking to you, I'm not going to begin until you look me in my eyes, are you listening? Show me that you're listening? Be a good girl…"

Despite my efforts, my report at the end of the semester reflected a student that 'needs attention' in the area of behaviour and what would describe me as a 'disengaged student,' but I was actually a very engaged student in a system which where the environment and approach required my engagement to look very different to the hyperactive, impulsive, student that I could only show up as.

I learnt to interpret my unique way of thinking and intelligence as someone who was dumb, because I couldn't be like the majority. I wanted to be enough, I wanted to have friends, I wanted to belong and I wanted to be wanted.

I stand here strong in who I am and determined to connect and unite our societies through understanding and embracing differences, but this has taken a lot of time, and learning.

I always knew I was different, and I didn't know why. When I was told of my diagnosis as having Autism it was a lot to take in, but I had hope that there were people like me out there, that there was a place I belong. But without having access to connect to this community, with nothing much changing in my life except I had a label attached to me that kept being brought up by teachers, and my parents on negative contexts.

I learnt that this word Autism described my differences, and these differences as the reason why I struggled, why I didn't have any friends, why I was disabled. The shame and hatred of the word grew inside me. My hope that I would get what I needed was disappearing, and I was left with a word to describe why, Disability. With hopelessness and lots of exclusion and experiences of being bullied the lens that I looked at became less present and more hopeless and scared. I didn't know where I could exist.

In my later teen years slowly, my life began to shift, these labels helped me in connecting to communities of people like me. There was the Aboriginal holiday leadership program where I was connected to mob, I remember going home and looking down at my shadow and beaming with pride, because I felt my ancestors with me. I connected to an Autism camp, and connected to Autistic role models who I identified with.

The one thing all of these had in common is it looked like me getting into the car by with all the resistance I had in me, with my mum pushing me in, and my legs on either side of the door frame… and finished with me feeling a sense of belonging, because I had just had the most amazing time connecting to my community.

Each of these parts of me are important and come with their own unique formula for access. But they are differences that are intersectional, no one is exactly like me and that can feel lonely like where the odd one out, but what we know, is no one is exactly like anyone. Some people are born into privilege and have greater abilities to conform to colonised society's idea of 'normal'.

I'm Elise Muller a proud Wiradjuri and Palawa First Nation person. I also come from Immigrant background on my mums' side. I'm not made in Australia, Australia was made on my country, I'm a LGBTQIA+ person, I'm female appearing as a non-binary person who is in a same sex relationship, I am Autistic with ADHD and like a lot of people with disability and who identities are in marginalised minority we co-exist navigating my anxiety, depression and Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (CPTSD) which for many people with disability comes.

Finding inclusive spaces where your identity is understood is difficult enough for one part let alone for all identities. This is a journey, and to move forward we need to look at not requiring people to fit into boxes, but rather make the boxes resourced and adaptable to be moulded around people.

Elise Muller
Autism Specialist Consultant | Disability Practice Advisor and Advocate | Elite Athlete | Multi-Award-Winning Advocate

Positive Partnerships Vision and Principles

Positive Partnerships believes in possibilities and what can be achieved by working together.

We value partnerships
We know the best outcomes for young people occur when parents, schools and community work together.

We value learning
We embrace innovation and change that advances our growth as a project.

We value diversity
Deeply listening to culture, autistic voice and lived experience.

Education and Autism within Culture

First Nations students come from rich and diverse family, cultural and language backgrounds. They bring with them wide-ranging life experiences and are culturally being prepared for future roles within the community (Saggers & Sims, 2005).

In 2017 there were 215,453 students enrolled in Australian schools identifying as First Nations (ABS, 2022).

To date, researchers have largely overlooked the relevance of culture with regard to autism. Nowhere is this truer than in Australia, where virtually nothing is known about First Nations experiences of autism (Lilley, Sedgewick, & Pellicano, 2019).

Positive Partnerships recognise and support the role of schools in recognising, encouraging and enriching the potential of First Nations students on the autism spectrum (Lilley, Sedgewick, & Pellicano, 2019).

We Look after our Own Mob

Positive Partnerships is proud to have collaborated with Macquarie University on a new research report titled 'We Look After Our Own Mob: First Nations Experiences of Autism'. On Tuesday 18th February 2019 this report was launched, the first of its kind in Australia.

The report shares lived experience stories and insights from First Nations families on how they feel about the state of autism-related services in their communities, as well as what changes are needed to enable autistic children to feel secure, safe and

supported at school. Focus is also placed on how we can all best honour the rights of autistic children to maintain authentic connection to their culture and community.

The report highlights key recommendations for educators, policy makers and disability services. It has provided evidence to guide the further development of Positive Partnerships professional learning and parent/carer programs and resources.

The families across the report highlighted diverse ideas regarding education, environment and programs that would be beneficial for their children on the autism spectrum. However, three themes were constant throughout:
• Safety of their child.
• Respecting First Nations cultures.
• The role of schools in recognising, encouraging and enriching the potential of First Nations students on the autism spectrum.

Reference Group

The Positive Partnerships team first established a First Nations reference group in 2014. The reference group is comprised by individuals from communities across Australia, and the current membership includes:

Myree Sam
Tammy Anderson
Jerome Hunter
Becc Clark

The members have extensive experience in the disability and education sectors with a specific interest in supporting families, educators and communities to support school aged students on the autism spectrum.

The purpose of the group is to provide guidance and feedback on the development and delivery of culturally appropriate workshops, online sessions and resources. The reference group support the Positive Partnerships team to identify and connect to communities across Australia.

The Positive Partnerships team are proud of the relationship with the First Nations reference group and highly value the contributions already made by the group over the years, and the ongoing collaboration during this phase of the Positive Partnerships program.

Positive Partnerships
First Nations Principles

## Principle 1 | Foster a culturally respectful workplace

Focus Area	What does it Look Like?
Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country Protocols	**Positive Partnerships will:** • Host a Welcome to Country or perform an Acknowledgement of Country at the commencement of significant meetings, workshops and events
Positive Partnerships create a safe knowledge sharing environment, where First Nations families, schools and communities are empowered to learn through the passing on of knowledge	**Positive Partnerships will:** • At the beginning of all face to face workshops and online webinars (within Introduction slides) acknowledge the ongoing journey of reconciliation • Support and nurture the First Nations home-school partnership with culturally appropriate resources • Ensure that all Yarning and Sharing workshops and Yarning and Sharing webinars are led by First Nations peoples • Recognise and acknowledge the impacts of our shared history through a commitment of working alongside First Nations people to re-gain trust • Celebrate the strengths and aspirations of First Nations autistic people and people on the autism spectrum
Recognise and celebrate Days of Significance	**Positive Partnerships will:** • Actively take part in additional national /local events / celebrations and share information about the meaning with all Positive Partnership staff (e.g. Sorry Day, National First Nations Children's Day, local festivals etc.) • Recognise and celebrate days of significance through our internal and external communication, such as team emails, internal newsletters, e-news and social media channels
Use of Terminology	**Positive Partnerships will:** • Investigate the development, implementation and review of a First Nations cultural terminology document • Use identity first language regarding the autistic community e.g. "autistic people," "autistic children"

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Principle 2. First Nations Community Engagement

Focus Area	What does it Look Like?
Develop and maintain mutually respectful relationships with First Nations peoples, communities and organisations	**Positive Partnerships will:** • Respectfully engage and consult with communities to aid in the development of dedicated First Nations content and resources • Work alongside community groups and professional bodies to plan, develop and deliver culturally appropriate evidenced based content that improve First Nations emotional and social wellbeing • Work with First Nations peoples to develop resources that can be accessed by communities across Australia and use experiences from community to guide Positive Partnerships in the provision of resources and learning opportunities • Invite local Traditional Owners to events and workshops we host • Develop and implement a First Nations community engagement document
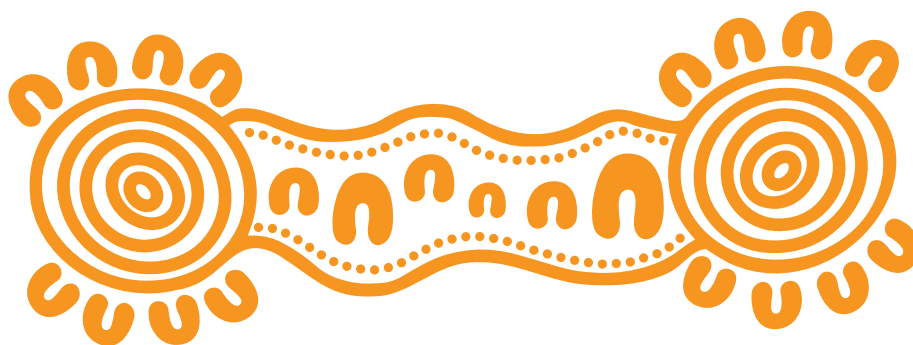
Principle 3. Positive Partnerships cultural development and training

| Focus Area	What does it Look Like?
Culturally responsive workforce	**Positive Partnerships will:** • Support ongoing cultural responsiveness training of all Positive Partnerships staff including ongoing professional development and capacity for self-reflection • Actively seek out and engage in shared learning alongside First Nations peoples to understand the truth of our nation's history • Actively seek opportunities for staff learning (e.g. attending NAIDOC activities, opportunities for involvement in First Nations resource development, all staff may have opportunities to attend and be part of planning and delivery of First Nations & Torres Strait Islander workshops) • Be encouraged to actively seek opportunities to experience and share cultural learnings whilst travelling with Positive Partnerships • Actively seek to increase understanding, value and recognition about First Nations cultures, histories, knowledge and educational practices through professional learning opportunities • Issue new staff with Working and Walking Together and We look after our Own Mob resources • Include a cultural learning opportunity during whole of team face to face events

Positive Partnerships | First Nations People Framework

Principle 4. Strengths-based Focus

Focus Area	What does it Look Like?
Recognition and Value of First Nations educational practices, languages and culture as a strengths base	**Positive Partnerships will:** • Through culturally responsive resources acknowledge and recognise the historical lack of access to educational opportunities (Cadzow, 2007)
External stakeholders can learn about the First Nations programs and resources	**Positive Partnerships will:** • Provide opportunities for First Nations resources to be disseminated across external stakeholder networks
Positive Partnerships ensures a strength-based approach when sharing knowledge about Autism and Education	**Positive Partnerships will:** • Ensure that a strengths-based way of thinking is increasingly evident within our First Nations resources • Foster the view that First Nations children are embraced as naturally strong and are positioned as equal members of the community, with the right to act autonomously and to make their own decisions (Guilfoyle, Sims, Saggers, & Hutchins, 2010) • Through Yarning and Sharing about autism workshops, Yarning webinars and our culturally responsive resources, acknowledge that First Nations children are central to community and family life, acknowledge the natural care network provided to them is supplied by the whole community and, as such, family and community involvement in the services themselves is considered an essential component of culturally strong programming (Guilfoyle, Sims, Saggers, & Hutchins, 2010)

## Principle 5. First Nations Experiences of Education and Disability

Focus Area	What does it Look Like?

Recognition and value of First Nations educational practices	**Positive Partnerships will:**
	
	• Through our Yarning and Sharing workshops, Yarning and Sharing webinars and our culturally responsive resources recognise and celebrate the ancient and sophisticated educational practices and systems that are:
	
	  • Based on spoken knowledge
	
	  • Teaching by experience and observation (Cadzow, 2007)

Autism and research within First Nations communities	**Positive Partnerships will:** • Actively seek opportunities to engage in culturally appropriate research regarding autism and the First Nations community

What First Nations families want from their schools	**Positive Partnerships will:**
	
	• Acknowledge and support the important issues raised by First Nations families regarding autism and schooling:
	
	  • Being safe
	
	  • Respecting First Nations culture
	
	  • The role of the school in recognising, encouraging and enriching the potential of First Nations communities
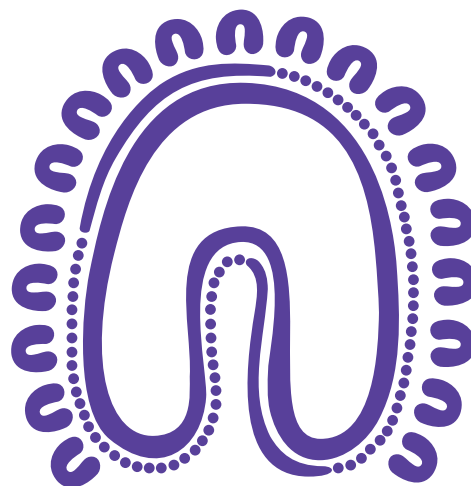
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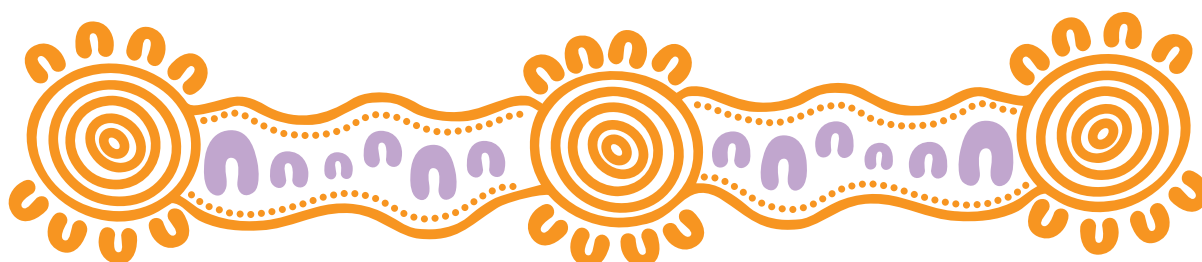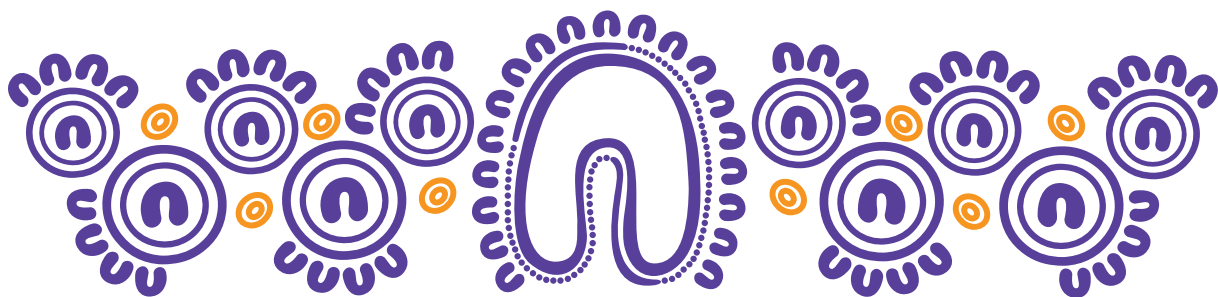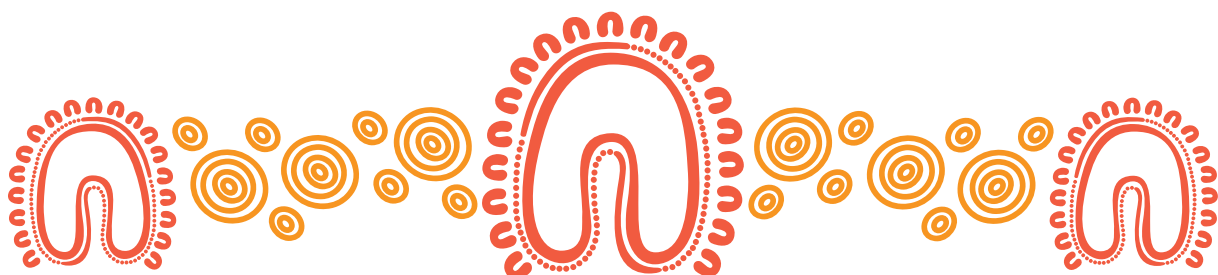
Positive Partnerships Panel Designs

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Engagement
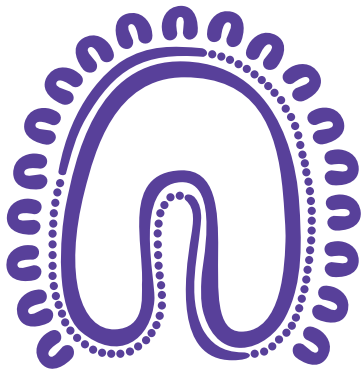
Educating Community Members and Sharing Knowledge

Empowering Positive Partnerships Staff & Upskilling

Positive Partnerships Cultural Designs

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Experience of Education & Disabilities:

This illustration shows the knowledge that is continuously passed down. Broadening learning opportunities and allowing Positive Partnerships to find space to learn and accept every person in our community.
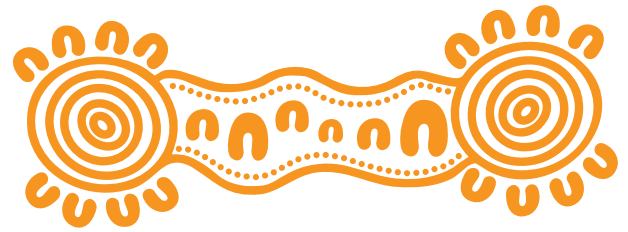
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Community Engagement:

This illustration has two meanings. The teachings that Positive Partnerships learn, and to take these learnings back to their work places to improve their services. It also represents the teachings that Positive Partnerships have and their importance in educating community about disabilities.


Foster Culturally Respected Workplaces:

This illustration shows the coming together of individuals in the workplace to share knowledge, experience and to be culturally safe.

Strength Based Focus:

This illustration shows the different perspectives of working with community. Building on the strengths that have come before Positive Partnerships and providing opportunities to support the strengths of our communities.
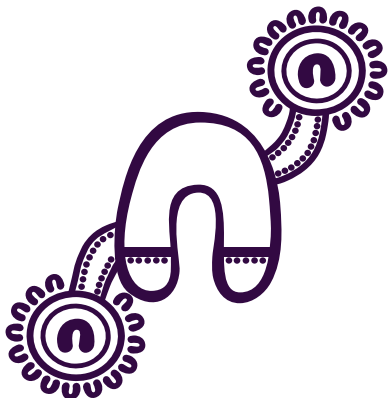
Positive Partnerships Development & Training:

This illustration shows the knowledge and learning experiences shared to upskill and train Positive Partnerships staff. It's a representation of the learning and training that staff undergo to become the best that they can to provide services to the wider community.

positive partnerships

Working together to support school-aged students on the autism spectrum