

Creating 'I CAN Schools': Schools that benefit from embracing Autism

Chris is founder and chief enabling officer of I CAN Network, Australia's first social enterprise founded by people with Autism. Chris' presentation will share the story of his 'I CAN Network' as a learner with Asperger's and offer insights into creating school cultures that seize the strengths of students with Autism for everyone's benefit. Chris and his team on the Spectrum work to achieve cultural change in schools through their I CAN Network Schools Program. This is achieved through a whole-of-school approach, starting with directly mentoring students on the Spectrum on a fortnightly basis.

The mentoring is unique because it is delivered predominantly by young adults on the Spectrum who have successfully become mentors through I CAN. The content of the mentoring sessions focuses on teamwork, personal strengths, 'I CAN' talks, communication and interpersonal skills, planning and organising, innovation projects and stress management.

Mentors also deliver motivational talks on resilience and leadership to the wider student body in an effort to make school safer for students on the Spectrum. They introduce teachers to I CAN's 'Quiet Magic Method' so it can be customised to the school community. This method identifies strategies that are quiet and subtle around people on the Spectrum, not heavy-handed. It emphasises everyone's responsibility in creating an enabling environment and supporting the positive profiling of students on the Spectrum. When everyone plays their role, it works like magic!

Across Victoria, 18 schools (including Catholic, government and specialist schools) have come on board the program in just 18 months. More information available here: ican.network/schools.