



I CAN Network - Mentoring Program for Autistic Students piloted in Queensland schools.

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¹I Can Network

Educators are invited to learn about 'culturally responsive pedagogy' in I CAN Network's mentoring program. I CAN Network is an education social enterprise with a 50% difference: 50% of the team are on the Autism Spectrum. I CAN work across 40 primary and secondary schools nation-wide (including specialist and Autistic schools) to deliver group mentoring programs designed collaboratively between young adults on the Autism Spectrum and teachers. The program empowers 600 Autistic students to say 'I CAN' by identifying their unique cultural strengths. Mentors and teachers influence inclusive school cultures by networking Autistic students into their student body.

Educators and parents will gain an understanding of how the achievement of the program's outcomes in a school, including Autistic pride, self-acceptance, belonging, optimism and confidence, can alleviate student anxiety and increase the opportunity for school engagement and learning. These outcomes were documented in the 2016 Australian Catholic University study of the I CAN mentoring program.

Specifically, educators will leave with a demonstration of the content and practices used by Autistic mentors and teachers in three Queensland schools: Caboolture State High School, Stretton State College and Crestmead State School. These programs have been a joint response by the Department of Education (Queensland) and I CAN Network to the moral imperative provided by the Deloitte review of disability in Education Queensland. Across these three programs I CAN has empowered students (aged 8-16 years) with diverse learning differences and backgrounds.

Significantly, workshop participants will benefit from the key findings of the Queensland program's evaluation which has involved baseline and post-program data collection in the latter half of 2017.

The workshop will look beneath the program's results to equip educators with some approaches for how they can leverage the unique strengths of Autistic students in their schools and influence an inclusive school culture. Examples of these approaches include:

- Connecting Autistic students with peer-to-peer experiences
- Increasing teacher understanding of Autism through involving teachers and students in group mentoring
- Creating structured conversations for Autistic students to identify their learning styles with teachers
- Educating student peer groups on a strengths-based view of Autism

At a minimum, educators will walk away with several story-based strategies for putting their school on a cultural change journey towards learning differences and Autism. These strategies will incorporate simple and more intensive approaches so that a diverse range of schools can engage with the workshop's content.