WELCOME

Chris Varney

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National Patron AASE

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Why?

- Knowledge/ status with history built my academic confidence
- Survived a Law degree by putting Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings into exam notes
- Built a program for students (who don't like programs!) by leveraging interests, e.g. Dress to Obsess, Interest Circle
- Employed close to 40 Autistic people by leveraging their motivation, leaning into their interests
- Case study of AWETISM Expo

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'Dress to Obsess'
86% of teens and 94% of young adults enjoy the camp experience
(Sample: 39 teens and 23 young adults)

How could you set up a class with Autistic students?

'INTEREST CIRCLE'

1. Share your name and an object that represents something you're really interested in

(it's okay if you don't have an object)

Hobbies

2. Share some info – When did you become interested in it? What makes you so interested in it?

3. Lastly, please share what's important to you in a group?

Tell us about your interests!

Tell us about your interests?
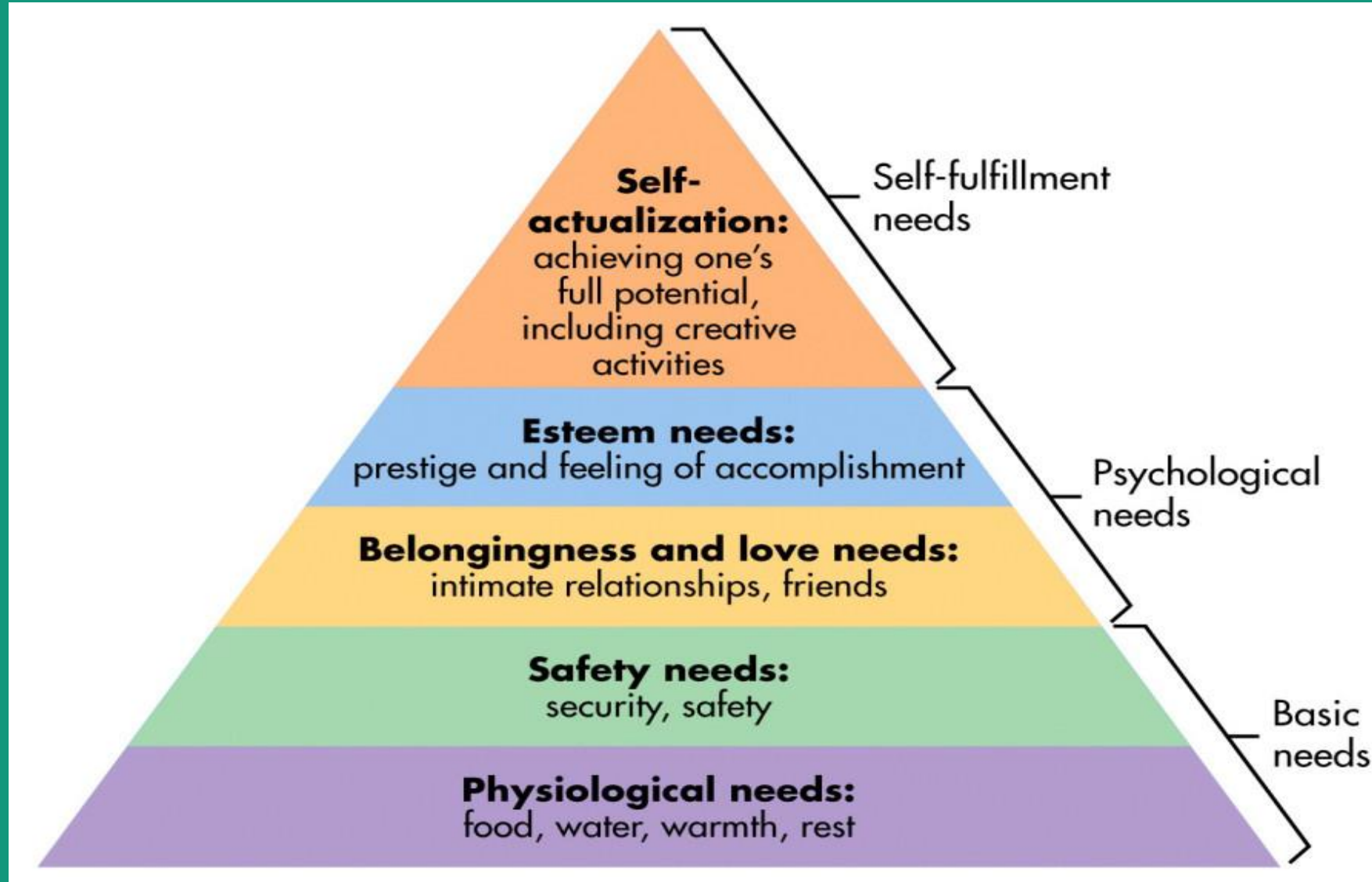
How long have you been interested?

What is about it that makes you interested?

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES & QUIET MAGIC METHOD

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

'Quiet Magic': a strategy b/w teacher, student and parent

HenRY VIII

Purpose, Skills, Networks

Focus of the plan:
- Purpose is to give a loving push
- 'We push ourselves to grow, we don't push ourselves to breaking point' (**'I CAN achieve'**)
- Network approach – student, parent and teacher all play a role in the development of resilience, purpose, skills and networks
- Aim is to train them to train themselves – through their challenges ('self efficacy', 'grit')

It needs these types of teachers
- Teachers who are patient
- Teachers who are motivating and encouraging
- Teachers who make it safe to take risks and have experiences
- Teachers who are disciplined, eg. set clear and consistent boundaries
- Teachers who are champions for Autistic students

How?
- You're constantly thinking about ways of quietly networking the students into their year level
- Creating positive profiles for the student
- Building up the interests of the students into a purpose and keeping the student's environment safe (and sensitive) for them to grow.

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Quiet Magic Method – influencing ILPs

WHAT DOES INCLUSION LOOK LIKE FOR THIS INDIVIDUAL?	INCLUSION GOAL(S)	INDIVIDUAL GOAL(S)	INDIVIDUAL'S STRENGTHS

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Quiet Magic Method – influencing ILPs

INDIVIDUAL'S AREAS OF INTEREST/HOBBIES	INDIVIDUAL'S OPTIMAL PROCESSING STYLE & SOURCES OF MOTIVATION
POSITIVE TRIGGERS	STRATEGIES, PLATFORMS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUCCESS & INCLUSION
NEGATIVE TRIGGERS	STRATEGIES, PLATFORMS & OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUCCESS & INCLUSION

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INSIGHTS & STRATEGIES: PRIMARY YEARS

In the beginning 'I CAN' was my parents' language

- I built my personality off imitating characters I loved in books, TV b/c stories was how I understood the world and my place in it

- Context was my brother was my great protector

- Autistic anxiety can be more intensive than typical 'angst' in kids, but should not be confused with clinical anxiety

- Addressing meltdowns – don't leave it too long, but ask 'Has the person humiliated themselves?'

- Leadership Teams – How do we help our classroom teachers by creating safe 'wins' for students among their peers, e.g. assemblies

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Relationships with Parents

- Boundary setting

- Promote wellbeing of the teacher

- Listen

- Identify trauma/ PTSD early

- Keep an active dialogue, invite solutions (don't feel like you need to have all the answers)

- Manage upwards, invite your Principal's support

- Ensure your messages to the parent are filtered before they reach the student, if they do

Our context – Primary Years

- I was loathe to be singled out. I required a lot of 'quiet magic' to create safe structures for me – e.g.
  - Group pairs in class
  - Close knit group of friends from my Mum's support group
  - Arrangement at school swimming lessons
  - Change and loss of control were major struggles e.g. new seating arrangements in class
  - I was a law abider at school, but a law breaker at home. Good teachers checked in with my Mum and Dad on their experience
  - I found school absolutely exhausting, e.g. recess and lunch were not recharge times, they were 'acting' times

Our context – Primary Years

- Frequent crippling obsessions, e.g. colours, socks!
- Incredible memory in certain areas
  - Paintings
  - Important dates in history, especially during the Tudor Years 1485 – 1603
  - Spelling
  - Writing stories
- Struggles
  - Science
  - Speaking with people my own change
  - Considering my siblings. I was very self-absorped

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Script for disclosure

- You can only gently nudge a parent with disclosure
- The most successful disclosures follow the maturity of the student

- *'I just want to say that you have the most guts of anyone I know,*
- *'You know your insane memory, your skills with spelling and what happens when you put your mind to something,*
- *'You know how at times you can be really difficult to live with,*
- *'And you can really pull some ridiculous carry on,*
- *'Well this all means you just have Asperger's and it's nothing to be ashamed of, it's something to be proud of'*

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Resource for parents' disclosing

- See our website: https://www.icannetwork.com.au/humans-2019/

- 'Humans on the Autism Spectrum'
  - Mirrors the New York platform with an Autistic lens
  - Stories of all ages and stages and diversities of the Spectrum
  - Very helpful for disclosing Autism, giving adolescents and teenagers a positive perspective on Autism

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We are open
Leveraging the interest to achieve self-worth, pride and public celebration

Role modelling and channeling

FAMILIES

Patience

Motivation

Discipline

FRIENDS/ SOCIAL

SCHOOLS/ EDUCATION

Experiential

Encouraging
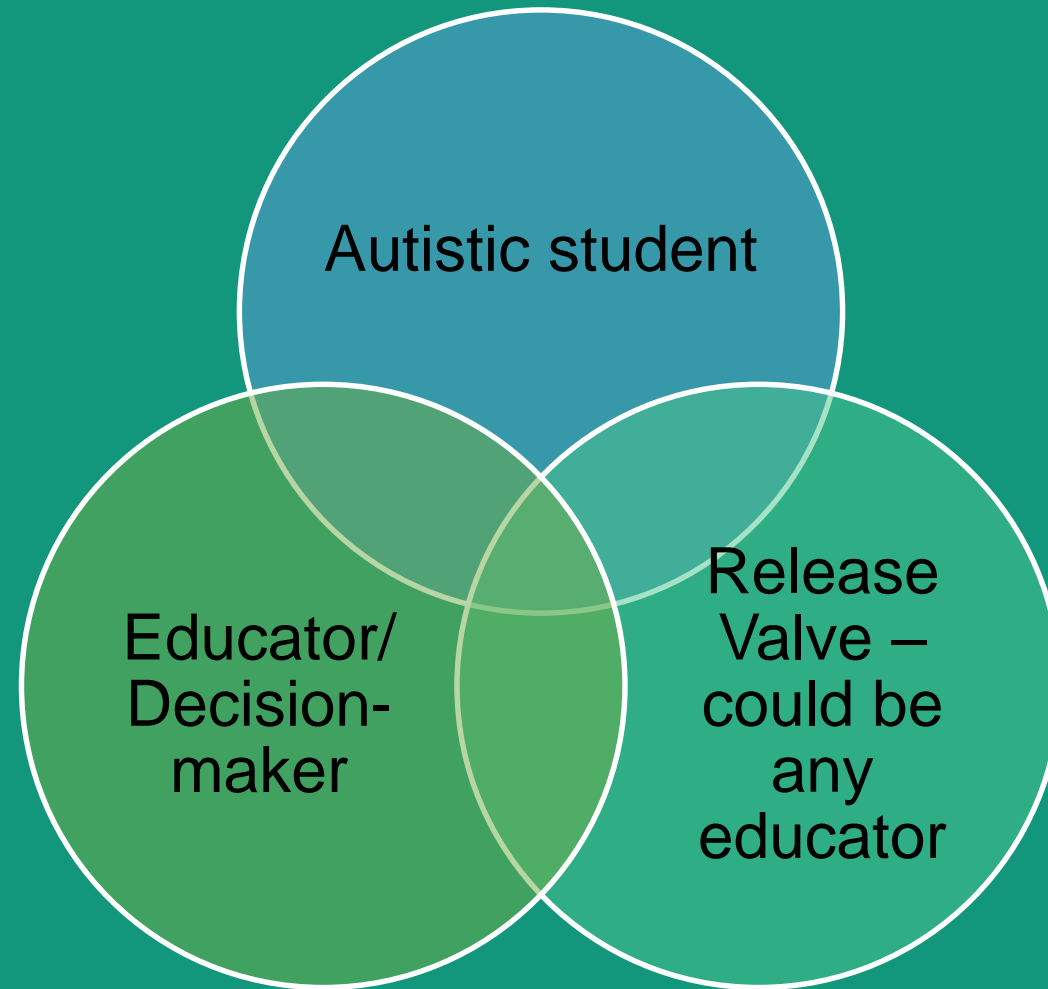
Champions

Acceptance

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INSIGHTS & STRATEGIES – SECONDARY YEARS

Our Context – Secondary Years
Education should model inclusivity – Vale Christine Horvath
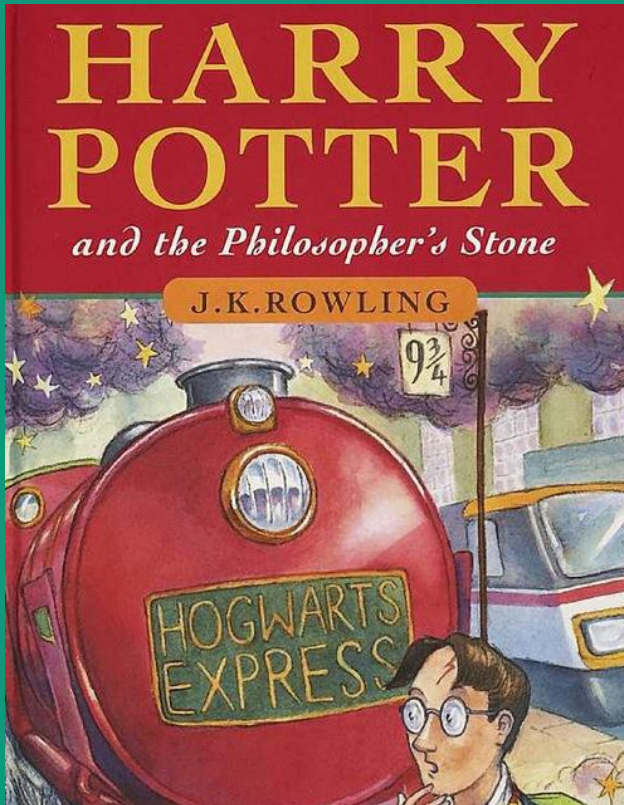
Practical approach to creating 'safety'

What can 'safety' look like?

Student – Regularly touching base with a safe person helps build a foundation of security and belief in self

Teacher – You become safe by valuing a different reasoning, because the student feels like you 'get' them.

Mrs Horvath was…

- ✓ A great listener
- ✓ Focused on the individual
- ✓ Relentlessly leveraged a student's strengths
- ✓ Created public opportunities in a year level to profile strengths and backed it up with emotional assurances
- ✓ Networked students who struggled to network
- ✓ Shared her own struggles…her vulnerability made her very accessible
- ✓ Understood the need for role models and 'characters' – to provide a script and persona to the student who needs them
- ✓ Established boundaries…you were not allowed to walk all over your parents
- ✓ Wise enough to step away when you didn't need her, but she made sure you knew she was available

Handwriting & Autism

- Genuinely difficult to organise your thoughts onto a page

- Strategies
    - Sequence the task for the absorbing Autistic brain
    - E.g. Create sub questions
    - Give a defined word limit
    - Outline the major point, give examples of minor details

Assessments & Autism

- Often I am seeing tertiary organisations be more flexible and nimble to what special consideration can look like than secondary schools

- What are you trying to assess?

- How could it be assessed?

- Does every aspect of that assessment need to be written? Could some of it be given verbally?

'Students-first' is essential in inspiring inclusive educators

How to tell my teacher 'I need help'

~ K.S.T.S ~

K KNOW — I KNOW that…

S STRUGGLING — I am STUGGLING with…

T TRIED — I have already TRIED…

S SUCCEED — I can SUCCEED if you help by…

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And…networks start again!

So What? What is Autism? What are the benefits for my school?

Understanding Autism

- A circular spectrum – with different areas, rather than different 'ends'

- Uniquely wired brains – processing difference

- A spectrum of strengths

- Highly focused, highly sensitive, highly creative group of people

- Experience emotional more intensively: emotional impact of events can last for longer. Practically it's important to provide 'release valves'
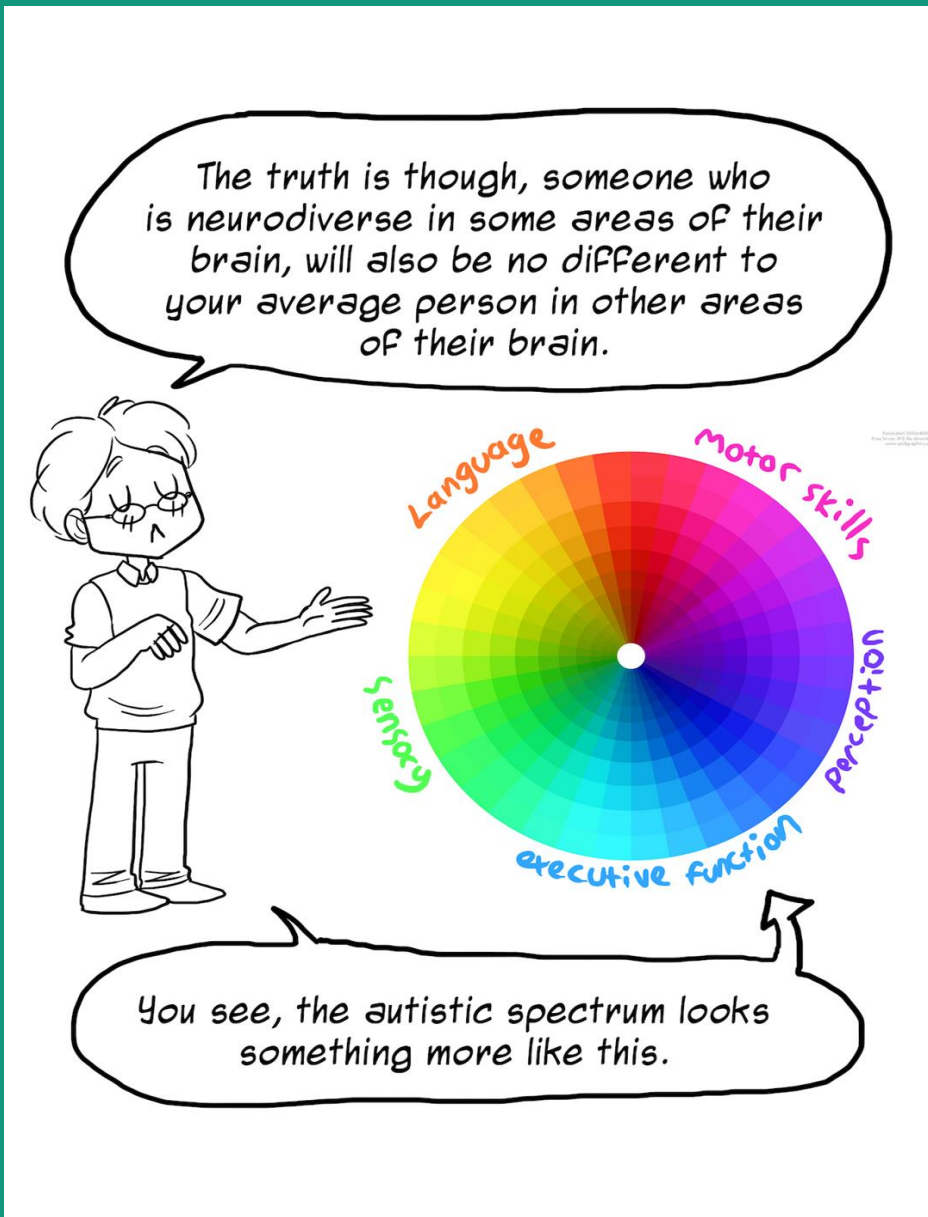
Attribution: Rebecca Burgess

What needs close attention here?

- Communication
  - Accepting relationships empower self-advocacy (make them feel safe to ask for help!!!)
  - Meetings (give employees structured space, don't solely rely on initiation)
  - One on one (give warning time on agenda)
  - Management/ employee reviews (give warning time on deadlines)
  - Agreements on project tasks (make it very specific to avoid 'nodding')
  - Wellbeing (ask about wellbeing, don't let anything build up)

- Change
  - New reporting lines (expect long processing time, invest more time early)
  - Physical space (create visual walk throughs)

- Control
  - Create space for Autistic employees to have ownership in their work

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Create structures based on communication preferences: The more 'heads up', the better!

a manager once said to me …your work is exceptional…but I'm going to have to mark you below average because of your communication skills"

What are the benefits?

- The return on investment is a highly focused staff member

- Their different perception can lead to innovative outcomes

- See things you might not notice

- Loyalty – to the brief, to their team, to their organisation, etc

- Truthful

- Memory capacity

- Ability to carry detail – can work in highly technical areas

- Cultural asset

Case Study in having high expectations: 'Jake'

Diagnostic Criteria:

- Won Sir John Monash Medal for academic excellence and service to community

- PhD candidate – immunology (some complicated protein)

- Structure guy – but ADAPTIVE (e.g. our accounts system)

It can be a life close to the edge. Requires a process of reducing anxiety. Learning happens in the green.
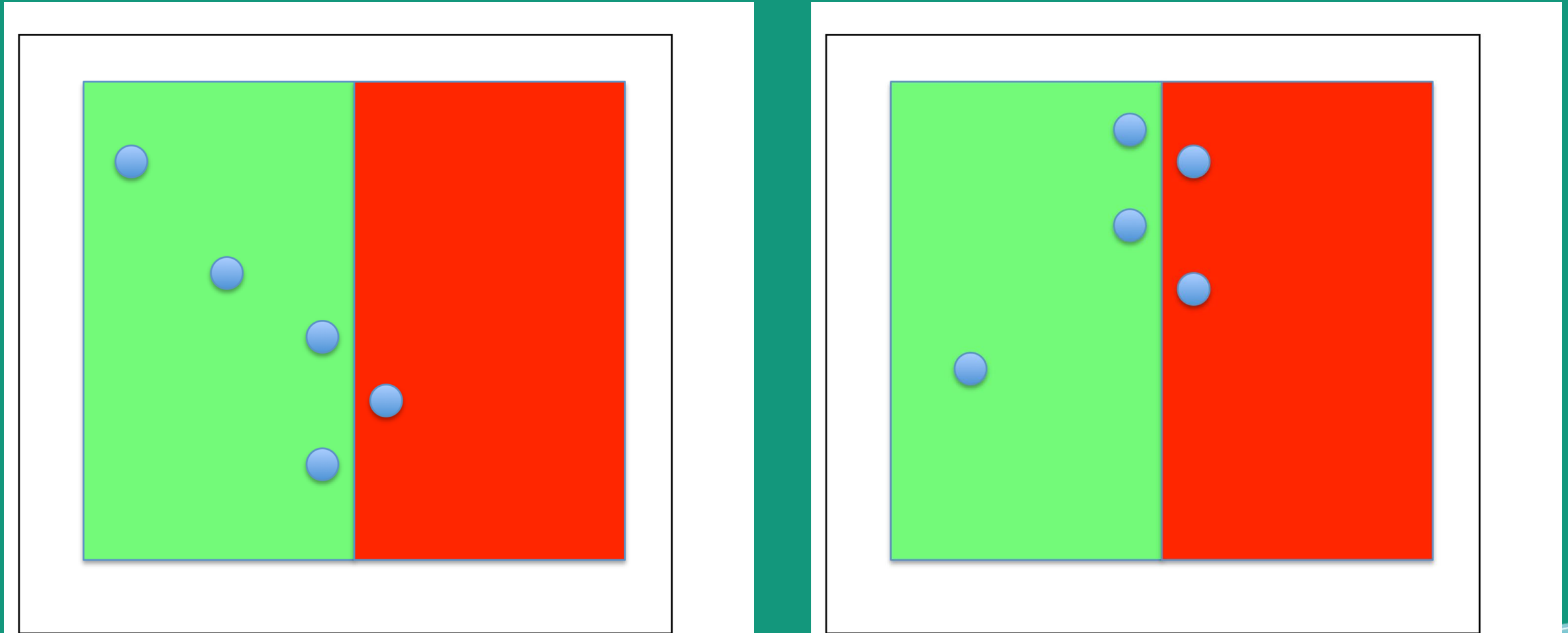
Things can escalate very quickly, sometimes with dramatic conclusions

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Movement-building: Australian context

Our context is myth-busting!

Awareness

98% of Australians report that they have heard of Autism

1 in 4 Australians have an Autistic relative

86% of Australians report having 'contact' with an Autistic person

Gaps in understanding

88% of Australians are aware that Autism affects everyone differently

Of concern, around 19% believe that Autistic people are violent

Gaps in understanding

46% of Australians report not having a good understanding of how to support someone with Autism

51.6% of Autistic Australians feel socially isolated

1 in 88 Australians are on the Autism Spectrum (OTARC)

Movement-building: Australian context

Kids and teens
More than 8 in 10 experience difficulty in school

4 times more likely to be bullied

Youth
35% do not complete Year 10 or above

44% need to change secondary schools b/c the schools aren't supportive

Adults
60% Autistic adults are unemployed;

'High-functioning' Autistics are nine times more likely to attempt self-harm

Language – 'support requirements'

Language type	Meaning
Reflective language	Dear parent/ student, what's your preferred words? Autistic, Autism Spectrum, ASD
Person-first approach	Person with Autism
Identity-first approach	Autistic person
Low functioning, severe Autism	Replace with 'greater support requirements', which has an action-oriented approach
High functioning	Replace with 'lesser support requirements'

Attributions:
1. Tim Chan TEDx, 'Turning Impediments Into Opportunities'
2. I CAN Network Communications Guide, 2016, informed by 60 Autistic people

Shifting the way Autism is viewed

I CAN Network is changing the way people view Autism and how Autistic young people view themselves.

- We are proudly Autistic-founded, Autistic-led and predominantly Autistic-staffed.

- More than 50% of our team is Autistic, with the vast majority of our mentors on the Autism Spectrum.

- We view Autism through a strengths-based lens.

- We celebrate people's passions, embrace their quirks, accommodate their needs and validate their identities.

- We run programs for Autistic young people in primary school, high school and for young adults

- We are building out the next generation of talent, as several of our I CAN mentees develop into (paid) mentors.

Our community began in what was seen as a 'rebel' act – we ran an Autistic-led camp (April 2014), with a 'Dress to Obsess' party!

Tribute to Christine Horvath

How do you help Autistic people feel 'safe?

1. Provide validation/ or value a different reasoning

2. Provide some emotional assurance/ break things into 'checkpoints' (role of characters)

3. Create channels/ give them responsibilities, something to control

4. Create a positive profile for them…platform their strengths

English Teacher

Junior School, Wantirna College 1999 - 2005

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Enabling Autistic students

How do you help Autistic people feel 'safe' to participate, engage and act?

1. Provide validation/ or value a different reasoning

What are some scripts for showing you acknowledge a different reasoning?

- Recognise different problem solving

- Position your attitude to think of this 'different reasoning' as an opportunity for innovation

- First reactions are important, be sensitive with the consistent boundaries you put in place

- Provide structured space to hear the student's ideas – eg. provide warning time, prompts, etc

- Reduce reliance on initiation, but still encourage initiation

'Wow, that's a very creative way of thinking about it'

'I had never thought about it that way'

'You know what…I've learnt something'

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Enabling Autistic students

How do you help Autistic people feel 'safe' to participate, engage and act?

1. Provide validation/ or value a different reasoning

2. Provide some emotional assurance/ break things into 'checkpoints'

Scripts

- What are some <u>scripts</u> for assuring Autistic people before they take risks?
    - 'You've got this'
    - 'Hey, you're fine'
    - 'I've watched you do harder things'
    - 'But won't it be great when you've done it?!'
    - 'What will make this easier?'

Five Steps to saying 'I CAN'

1 Be clear about what you want
2 Believe in yourself
3 Be persistent
4 Be positive, get back on track after setbacks
5 Be confident, every achievement is a checkpoint

Our culture of mentoring

Mentee → Mentor-in-training → Junior Mentor

Case study in assurances/ checkpoints

Kyal Kay – mentored Lachlan in group settings from 2016

Lachlan Peach – at his first I CAN Camp (April 2016) before commencing our Foundations program

Lachlan Peach – employed as a Junior Mentor in 2018

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Case Study: Caitlin

2016: *'School was a very difficult time for me, I didn't find the I CAN Network until I was in year 12. I was always aware, or was reminded about the things I couldn't do at school. Apart from my small family, I didn't get much encouragement. I do remember one special teacher, Miss Pretto, who helped me a lot'.*

2019: Push yourself to grow

Enabling Autistic students

How do you help Autistic people feel 'safe' to participate, engage and act?

- Create channels/ give them responsibilities, something to control
- Create a positive profile for them…platform their strengths

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Case Study: Create responsibilities that give students a role.

St James College East Bentleigh(Victoria), 2016 - 2018

Communication Preferences

QUIET MAGIC

'STRUCTURE UP' BASED ON COMMUNICATION PREFERENCES ASK SPECIFIC QUESTIONS, BE WARY OF LEAVING THINGS VAGUE	**LEVERAGE THE MOTIVATION** DRAW A LINK TO THE PERSON'S STRENGTHS & INTERESTS
CREATE THE RIGHT CHANNEL FOR THEIR MEMORIES Eg. CHALLENGE MIGHT BE SEQUENCING – CREATE QUESTIONS	**CALCULATE THE PROCESSING TIME** BROADEN YOUR MINDS WITH THE WAYS PEOPLE CAN CONCENTRATE

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Different processing styles: Kyal

Different processing styles*

- Visual – have a visual or draw it with them
- Aural – rely on sound and music
- Verbal – text-based learners
- Kinesthetic – doers
- Logical – prefers the 'maths' in it, or rather the systems
- Social – prefers group work
- Solitary – prefers own space

https://www.learning-styles-online.com/overview/

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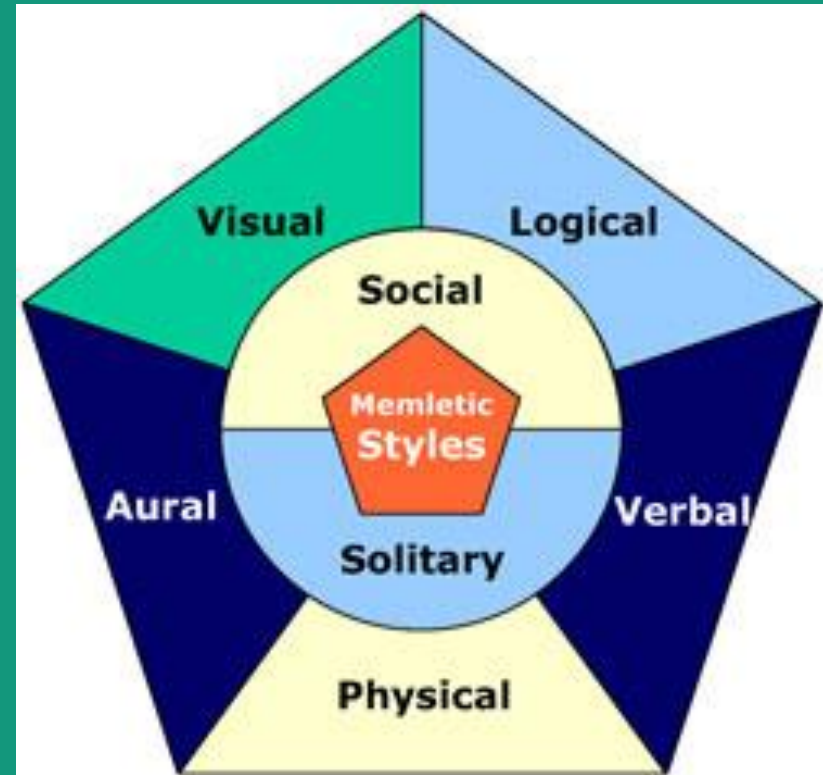
Give them the high-level concepts

What is Autism?...Sensory differences

PENNY ROBINSON: *Autism – and sensory sensitivity – is just part of who I am. My sensory sensitivity has gotten worse over the last couple of years as I've gotten busier, but my confidence to use strategies to reduce the impact on me has increased because I've had a supportive and enabling network of people around me. This includes my workplace – it's accepted that I'll wear my cap if I'm having a "bad lights" day – enabling me to continue getting my work done and be productive! I jokingly used to call the seminar room "headache room" – now I always wear my cap in there after a colleague suggested it. A flexible workplace with open communication has enabled me to work to my full potential. It is important that all people on the Autism Spectrum are given the same opportunity to thrive.*

www.ican.network/humans/penny

Insight is some sensory needs can intensify as life gets busier

What is the I CAN Network?

I CAN Network delivers mentoring programs.

SCHOOL-BASED GROUPS & EXPOS
- Our cornerstone I CAN mentoring offering
- Delivered at school over 10-15 fortnightly sessions
- High impact
- Large feeder to camps program

WEEKEND CAMPS
- Our most popular offering; demand vastly exceeds available spots
- High impact
- Rich training ground for junior mentors
- About to launch post-camp online mentoring group

ONLINE GROUPS
- Delivered at home via Zoom technology
- Increasingly becoming a feeder for camps program
- At present, most participants coming from Victoria
- Incoming contract with Dept Ed QLD to dramatically grow online presence in that state

COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS
INDIVIDUAL MENTORING
SPEAKER'S AGENCY
CONSULTANCY
- Often the first exposure a family has to I CAN
- Potential to more overtly complement our face-to-face and online groups

Culturally responsive pedagogy
- designing a program to influence school-wide culture change
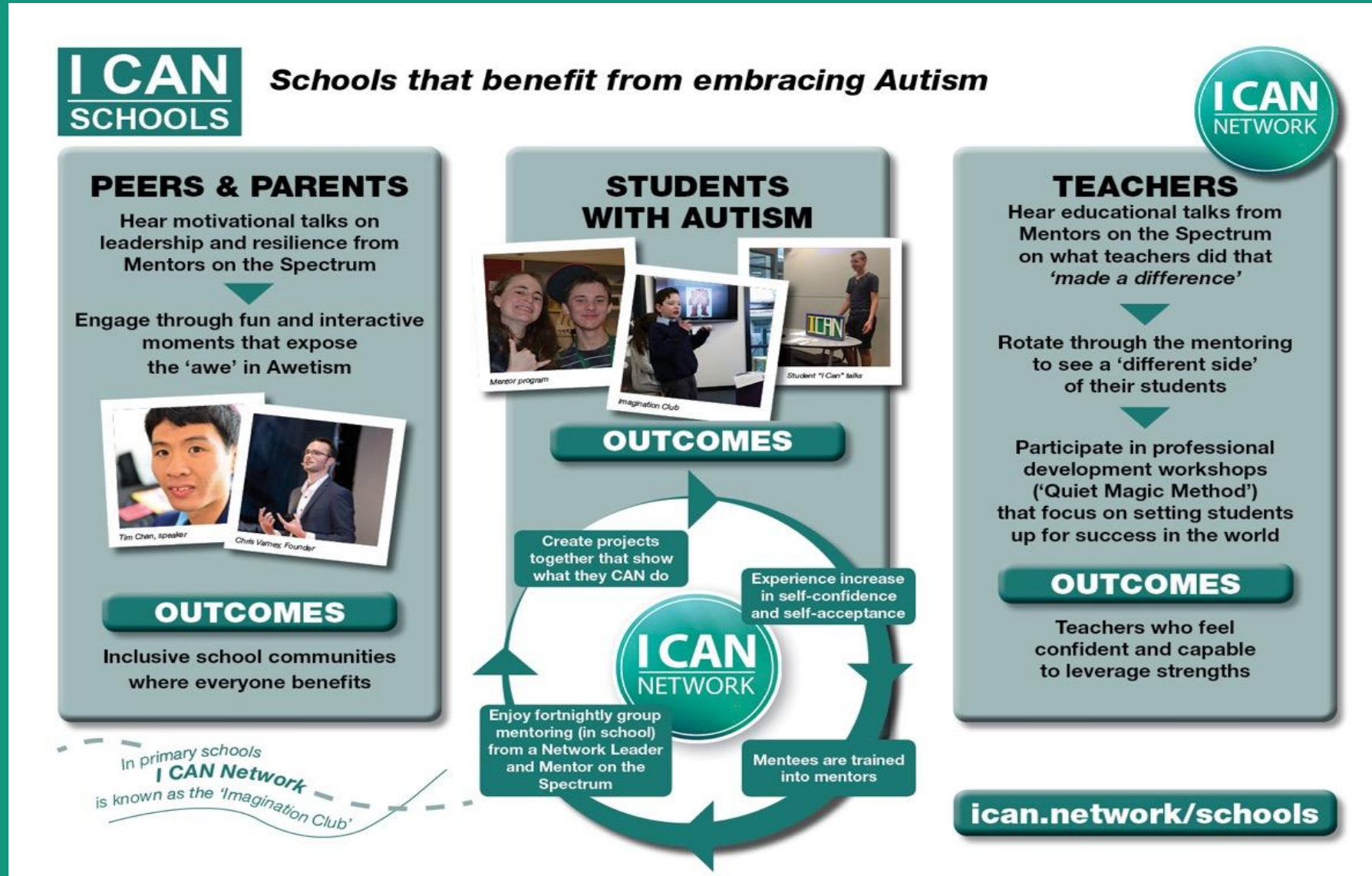
Nuts and Bolts of I CAN Schools

Module 1: Teamwork	Topic: Working Together
I CAN Network:	Teacher Supervisor:
Network Leader:	Room:
Contact ph no:	Date:
Mentor/s:	

TIME	STRUCTURE	MATERIALS
5 mins (PLAY)	**Entry game: Hangman** Purpose: We want to occupy people straight away Facilitator: • Choose one person to choose a secret word • They draw a blank line for each letter in the word on the whiteboard • Other students start guessing letters in the word • Fill the letter in the blanks if the players guess correctly • Draw part of the "hangman" when the players guess incorrectly.	Whiteboard & markers
3 mins (TALK)	**Welcome and Good News** Purpose: Start on a positive Facilitator: • Go over today's schedule and give students the opportunity to share good news (use talking stick)	Visual #6 – Good News - To be displayed on the I CAN wall
2 mins (TALK)	**Group Agreements** Purpose: Get the group's ownership in the values of the group Facilitator: • Read through the group agreements, typed up and displayed on the I CAN wall.	Group agreements from last week
5 mins (TALK)	**Election of a name** Purpose: Get the group's ownership in the name of the group Facilitator: • Ask for ideas for a name for the group. Write up to six names on board. Tell students they will vote on a name later in the session	Whiteboard and markers
5 mins (PLAY)	**Game: Birthday order** Purpose: Encourage group interaction and have fun Facilitator: • Make a line of people in birthday order without talking – Day and month NOT year. • When line is complete, get students to say their birthday to check order	

- Teamwork
- Interests and Strengths
- Communication
- Well being and Identity
- Planning and Organising

Self-acceptance

Belonging

Optimism

Confidence

HOW? 4 content components

PLAY, LEARN, TALK, DO

Informed by AYMN Conference, 2015

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What does success look like?

- Communities in which it is safer to disclose that you're Autistic

- Autistic people are actively involved in the decisions that affect them, e.g. in community services

- Autistic people are driving the conversation on Autism, so that we have a more accurate view of Autism

Meet Aquinas' Mutants (I CAN Program)
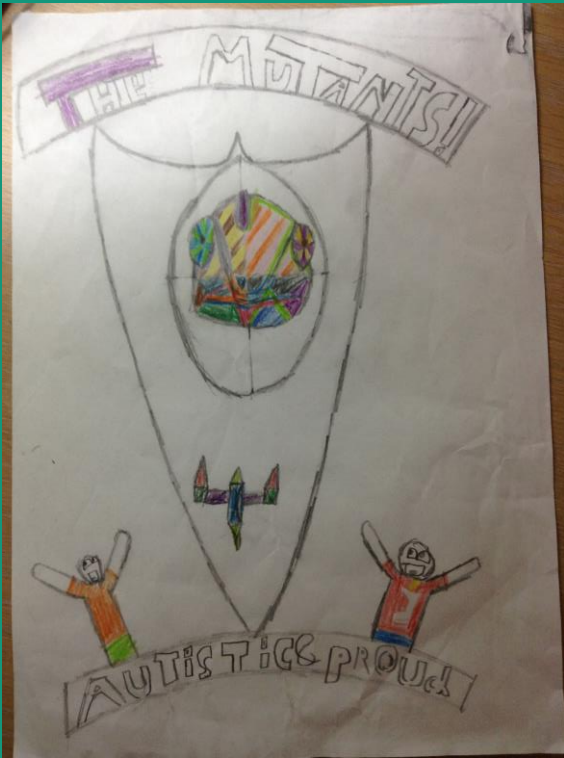
March 2016 – Aquinas College begins with I CAN Network. Autistic students form 'The Mutants' through the program

Partnership between students, teachers and parents

Students at I CAN Schools have preferential registration to I CAN Camps

Meet Aquinas' Mutants (I CAN Program)

Once proud of their Autism, the students began to educate their wider student bodies

Amelia running her 'Moonlight Jewellery' stall at I CAN Network's AWETISM 2018

Tom Freeman presenting at AWETISM 2018

Online Mentoring

First piloted in Spring 2017, online mentoring allows us to reach new mentees in meaningful ways and deepen relationships with young people who have already had exposure to I CAN.

- Represents a natural extension of our established successes in school-based programs and camps.

- Little else like it in the marketplace right now.

- Provides lower risk, lower cost means for entering a new community/region.

- Enables us to connect with Autistic young people in the security of their own home – with no stress of travel and using a medium that appeals to many.

- Great market potential: 1 in every 88 Australian is on the Autism Spectrum, with 22,000 Autistic kids between ages of 7-14 under NDIS (2018 estimates).
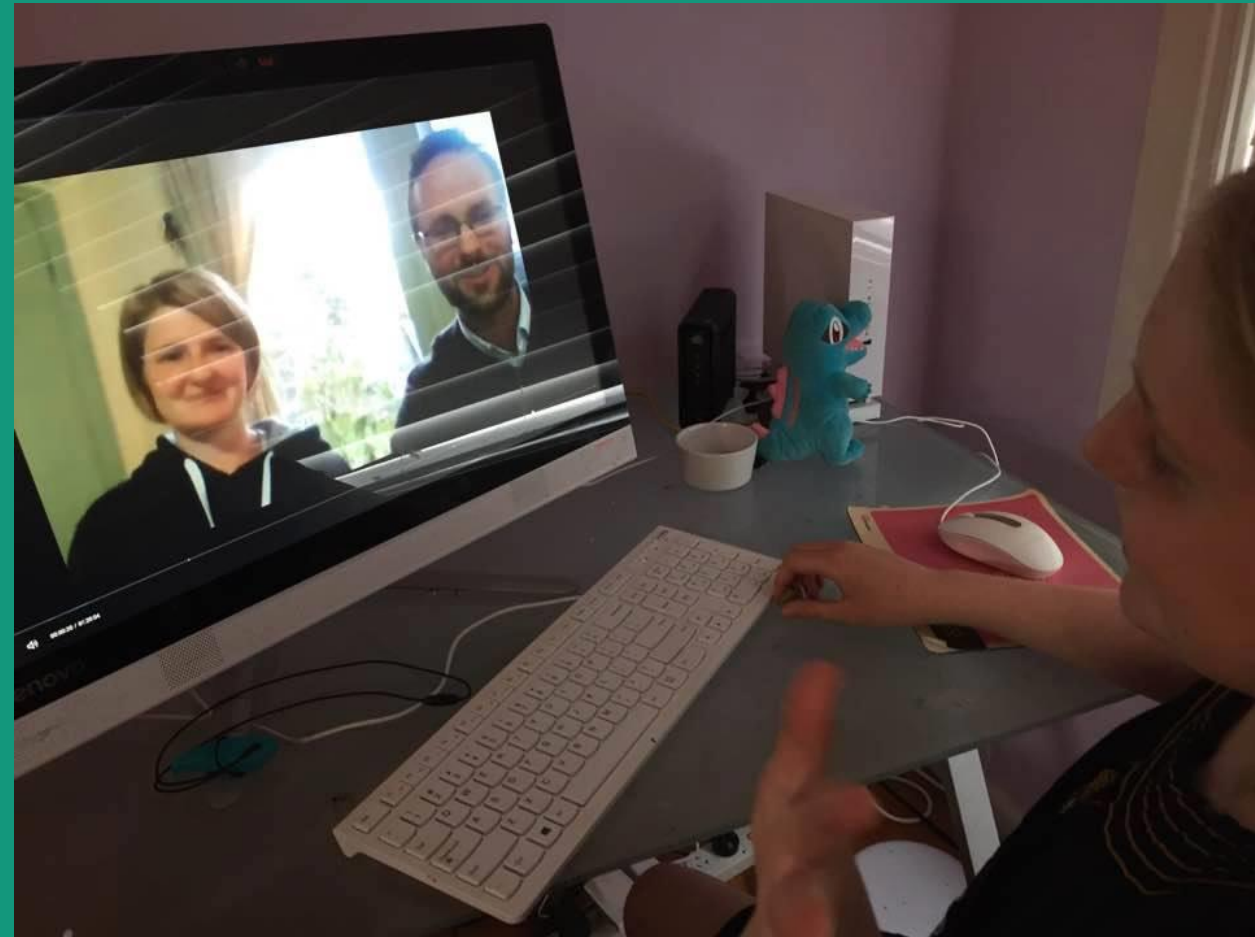
Staff Capabilities Framework
Developing Autistic leaders

Customer Service

People

Values

Content

Wellbeing
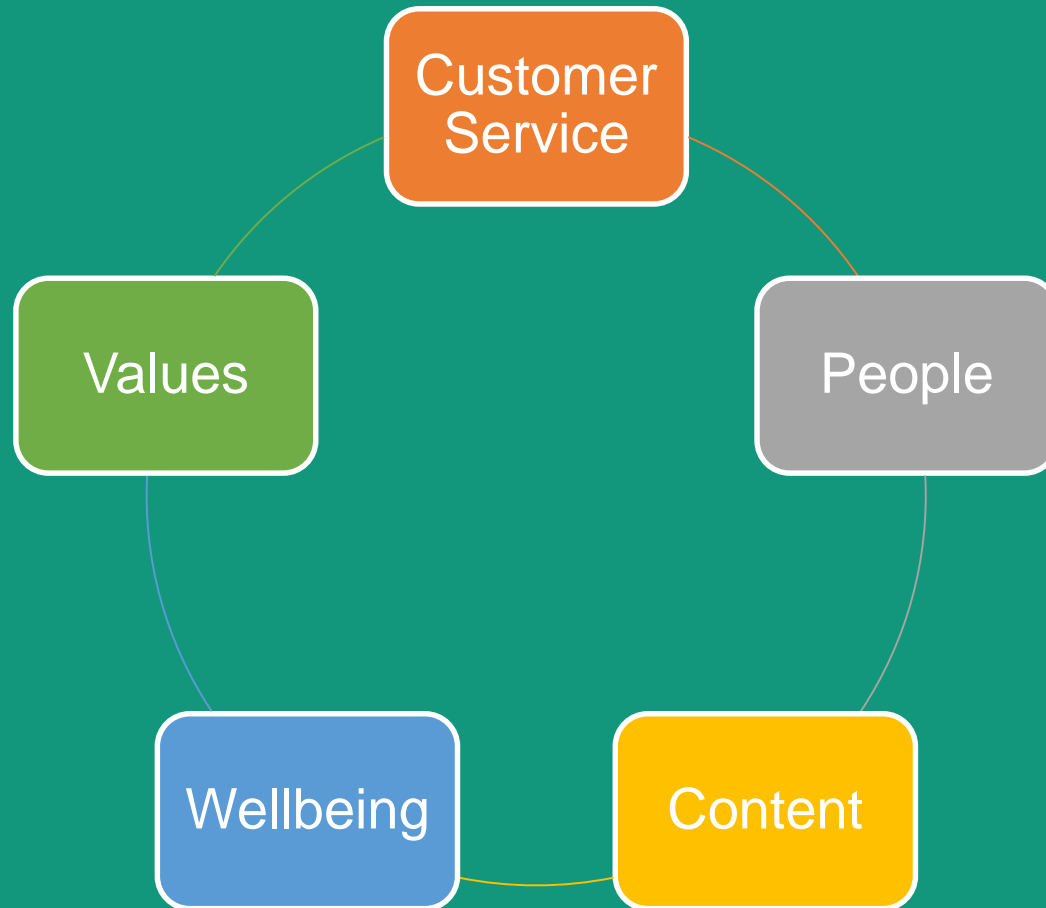
Three stage program
1. Foundations
2. Pathways
3. Leadership

Structure: 50% Autistic target

- 50% target taken very seriously (39 Autistics engaged in the business, of which 29 are currently employed)

- Structure supports a frontline 'Network Leader' (program facilitator) and Mentor

- Deputy CEO role also has a Psych background, supporting intersection b/w Autism and mental health

- Geography and demand has initially forced a remote workplace, with four regions across Victoria and Queensland (management team also stretches to NSW)

- Team gatherings and training bring the team together; there are future plans for a common space in Melbourne

Strategic Enablers (5 Dirs, 2 Autistic)

Chief Enabling Officer (Autistic)

Central Network Manager (Autistic), Psych

Business Development Managers

Regional Managers (4, 1 Autistic)

REGIONS

Brisbane Qld (4 Autistics)
South West Vic (3 Autistic)
Goulburn Murray Vic (8 Autistic)

Senior Network Leaders (2 Autistic)
MEL

Network Leaders & Mentors (21 Autistic)

I CAN Camps & Online Programs

Executive Assistant/ Speaker's Agency

Speakers/ Trainers (inc. 18 Autistic)

Finance

Advocacy & Marketing

I CAN NETWORK

We are trying to overcome 'shame'.

Thank You!

chris.r.varney@gmail.com

@chrisrvarney

HOW TO LEVERAGE PROCESSING STYLES & MEET SENSORY NEEDS

DANIEL MUNTER & CARLA BURN

Processing Style - Daniel

- Visual learner, explicit step-by-step demonstrations.

- Engaging in topics of interest.

- Personal recognition and interaction.

- Learning through story or example, and the relevance of its application.

- Linking ideas.

Processing Style-Carla

- Visual and Kinesthetic learner
- Very engaged in topics of interest (common theme in Autistic individuals)
- Processing information is easier when I write information down, and have opportunity to clarify
- less pressure equals better processing (could never be a stockbroker!)
- Engaging in discussion to learn aka external processing

Processing Style in the Classroom- Daniel

- Use of visuals.

- Use of explicit verbal instructions.

- Answering questions.

- On camps we ensure everyone understands/processes information by asking questions related to content (such as rules) as well as independent checking/re-teaching on an individual level.

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Processing Style in Classroom- Carla

- Use of visuals
- Opportunity to ask questions, and process information received externally (could be done after class in private)
- Clear and direct instructions
- As little background noise as possible, as it affects processing of instructions etc. delivered verbally by teacher

Approaching the teacher after class, and clarifying with them what was learnt based on what you wrote down throughout the lesson.

Sensory Needs   - Daniel

- I have a sensory aversion to sound.

- Use of tools to engage in difficult situations/environments.
  - Ear plugs at music gigs, headphones at shopping centres.

- Having a sensory need met is extremely important for feelings of safety.

- Being engaged in sensory overload can lead to meltdowns or anxiety attacks.

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Sensory Needs-Carla

- Aversion to certain types of touch e.g. hugs (unless I know the person very well)

- Auditory sensitivity to certain sounds, such as motor bikes, vacuums, trucks, train horns, fire alarms

- Sitting down for too long can create stress; highly understimulating and affects concentration. 'Stimming' helps.

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Sensory Needs in the Classroom- Daniel

- Fiddling toys!
- Noise requirements, techniques that quiet a room without additional noise. (Hands up policy).
- Safety from outside influences (such as bystanders etc.)

- Camp and expos have a quiet space which people can engage in quiet activity to avoid stimulation.
- Overloading stimulation can be negated through mindfulness activities, as well as structured free time that allows mentees to disengage from stressful environments.

Sensory Needs in Classroom-Carla

- Tactile sensory aversion e.g. physical contact, being overcrowded
- Textures and sensations either cause stress or stimulate me positively e.g. felt tip pens-LOVE writing with them
- Small, crampy classrooms can be stressful and distracting
- Teacher/Aids leaning over me, or closely beside me could contribute to sensory overload

- Sometimes these things cannot be avoided, hence movement breaks e.g. being able to leave the classroom aka 'go to the toilet' to have a sensory break

HOW TO ENGAGE THE NON - ENGAGED STUDENT

CARLA BURN & CHRIS VARNEY

Motivation to come to school and engage with learning-Carla

- Knowing there would be an opportunity to engage in subjects of interest. My favourites were Drama, Media and English.
- Having a protective/support network via a trusted teacher, friendship group
- Certainty that teachers will be open to understanding me, and be equipped to accommodate my needs as best they can.

Strategies that worked well when I had no interest in what was being taught- Carla

- Extra encouragement from teacher
- Achieving teachers expectations to complete work in small, broken down steps

The subject I had no interest in was maths, but that was also because I struggled with the subject. I had one teacher in year 9 who was always very encouraging, and believed in my ability to do my best. That was the year I performed really well in maths.

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What worked in reducing anxiety and being overwhelmed at school-Carla.

- Opportunity to leave class momentarily when feeling stressed-going for a walk around school, going to the bathroom to jump up and down etc.
- Listening to music
- Having a quiet space to go to e.g. in library
- minimal homework-already exhausted by the time school is finished
- sense of belonging somewhere e.g. performing arts faculty (that was for me)
- Trusted support person- Ms Di Vitto and Ms Sammut in year 7!

Story of Daniel –
23-year-old
Autistic leader

Senior Network
Leader, I CAN

@i_can_network

Who am I

- Daniel Munter, 22 years old.
- Senior Network Leader at the I CAN Network.
- Studying a Bachelor of Psychology (Honours) at Monash University.
- Bachelor of Music at the Australian Institute of Music.

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My Interests

- Vinyl Collector
- Shoe Enthusiast
- NBA Obsessive

School and Autism

- Autism to me (now) is a superpower!

- Diagnosed at 12, from 12-18 I was unwilling to disclose my Autism to anyone outside of my closest friendship circle.

- Struggled to be engaged in traditional academic framework.

- Music + drama department became my refuge.

Career Progression and Lessons Learnt on the Way

- McDonalds + Pancake Parlour

  - Big businesses provided me with workplace experience and experience of working with a diverse range of people.

- Instrumental music teacher, STEM education provider

  - Key mentors teaching me invaluable skills about:

    - Independent working.

    - Future directions and business development.

How I got started at the I CAN Network

- Referred by a family member.

- Began immediately, now currently running 5 school programs, and four individual mentoring programs.

- In contact with approximately 50 children on the spectrum every fortnight.

- Project manager of the last Awetism Expo at ANZ docklands.

Key Supports (My I CAN Network)

- Mum
  - Support at home.
  - Support with planning and organizing.

- Friendship Circle
  - Social support

- Brianna (my partner)
  - Idea springboard.
  - Emotional support.