

18/2/2020



Dear Parent/Guardian,

This letter is an invitation for your young person to be one of the students to participate in the I CAN Echuca Interschool mentoring program taking place at Bendigo TAFE, Echuca campus during Semester One (dates to be advised).

The I CAN Network is Australia's first social enterprise founded by people with Autism. We run a mentoring program to empower people on the Spectrum to have an 'I CAN' attitude and inspire their peers with the 'awe' in Awetism.

Our suite of mentoring programs can be delivered to groups of students on the Spectrum across primary and secondary schools, universities, TAFEs and workplaces. Its point of difference is that the program is delivered by mentors on the Spectrum, typically people who are at university or TAFE or a young professional on the Spectrum.

At Echuca, the mentoring will occur on Thursdays for 10 sessions on set dates over the semester. The mentoring will follow the below series of modules to develop strong leadership and communication skills in participants.

MODULES (to modify depending on program)	No. of Sessions
TEAMWORK: Builds a sense of belonging and connection among participants	x 2 sessions
PERSONAL MOTIVATIONS/ STRENGTHS: Goal-setting	x 1 sessions
SAYING 'I CAN' Motivational storytelling: Your story. Mentor stories. Our stories	x 1 sessions
COMMUNICATION Listening, networking and public speaking skills	x 3 sessions
PLANNING & ORGANISING Learning how to create a project	x 2 sessions
END OF PROGRAM EVENT Creating a project that exposes the 'awe' in Awetism	x 1 sessions

Outcomes of the program for participants include an increase in self-acceptance, social connection, optimism and self-confidence.

Will my young person be 'singled out'?

Parents frequently share with us their concern that participating in I CAN Network might 'single out' their young person. It's entirely up to your young person whether they share the details of the I CAN program with their peers. I CAN Network will never disclose participants' names. If students are not ready to disclose that they're on the Spectrum, we encourage them to tell their peers and teachers that they are *'participating in a youth leadership program'*.

Please note also that every group of participants in I CAN creates their own name for the program. They do not even have to call it I CAN Network.

Can my young person attend a camp?

As a participant in I CAN's high school mentoring program, your young person has the opportunity to participate in I CAN Camps. The I CAN Camps are an additional part of the I CAN experience and bring together 40 teenagers on the Spectrum and 20 mentors. The mentor team predominantly consists of young leaders on the Spectrum and health and educational professionals.

The camp fosters social connection, team building and Autistic pride. Overwhelmingly families report positive changes in their teenager having participated in the camp. For information about camps please refer to our website: <https://www.icannetwork.com.au/camps/>

Statement of studies conducted in programs

We conduct studies with young people in the program and their parents to collect information on the quality of the mentoring program and the impact the program has to young people on the Autism Spectrum. These studies will involve the completion of paper and online evaluation forms by young people and parents throughout the year. We will ensure that the information is kept secure, accessed only by relevant people in the I CAN Network and used only for the purposes of investigating the quality and social impact of the program.

Participation in these studies is **voluntary**. If you or the young person decide **not** to participate in these studies, please state in the registration form that you do not want to participate. There will be no disadvantage to the young person if they decide not to participate in the studies.

Next Steps

We would like to invite your family to our **Family Information Session** to find out more about our program.

Date: Tuesday 25th February

Time: 5.30-6.30pm

Location: Bendigo TAFE, Echuca Campus Crn Hare &, Darling St, Echuca

We have attached an Expression of Interest form that you can complete if you would like your child to participate in the Program. Please return to your school or bring it to the Family Information Session. We will then let you know as soon as possible whether your child has gained a place in the program.

Finally, we're very excited about the possibilities the I CAN program holds for local young people on the Spectrum. This model really wants to see Echuca benefit from embracing Autism and connecting our young people with great pathways.

Thank you for your interest. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions. Your local contact from I CAN Network is Kate Andrews (contactable on 0421 937 952 or at kate.andrews@icannetwork.com.au).

Yours faithfully,

Chris Varney
Chief Enabling Officer
I CAN Network Ltd.