Autistic students and the transition to university: Findings and recommendations

# Slide 16 – Student Themes:

## Sense of Self and Identity

* Importance of understanding oneself
* Deciding to disclose is complex
* Self-awareness versus internalised ableism
* Camouflaging and masking to overcome difficulties

## Persistence and Resilience

* Anxiety: “Enormously stressed, but very determined”
* Transition and first year as a period of adjustment
* The journey to and through first year at university

## Accessing and Receiving Support

* Family support: Emotional, practical, financial
* Peer support: Seeking social connection, but not always finding it
* University support: Programs and people
* Genuine understanding of autism

# Slide 18 – Support Network Themes (Interviews):

## Early and Ongoing Support

* The first year of university is a critical period
* Delays and difficulties with help seeking impact support provision
* Transition support is needed before, during, and beyond the first year

## Peer-to-peer Support

* Benefits and challenges associated with autism specific mentoring programs
* Facilitated social groups also provide peer-to-peer support

## Support Networks Outside of the University

* External supports: Emotional and practical
* External support networks: Barriers to providing support
* The challenges of balancing support need and autonomy

## Supporting Autistic University Students

* Recognising the diversity and individuality of autistic students
* Providing appropriate support requires time and resourcing
* Developing a university wide understanding of autism
* Autistic students would benefit from a safe space on campus

# Slide 20 – Family Member Themes (Survey):

## Parent Support

* Parents played a functional and practical support role
* Parents as advocates: “Fighting” for support
* Benefits of parent support
* The challenges of balancing autonomy and support need

## University Supports

* Delays and difficulties with university support
* Recommendations for university transition support

# Slide 22 – Staff Member Themes (Survey):

* University staff support: Emotional, Practical and academic
* The benefits and challenges of providing support to autistic students during transition
* Improving support for autistic students’ transition in the future
* Interacting with family members: Advocacy and developing independence

# Slide 24 – Bioecological Theory Model Factors That Impact Transition:

## Individual

* Diagnosis, Identity and Sense of Self
* Self-awareness or Internalised-ableism
* Disclosure and Help-seeking
* Persistence and Resilience

## Microsystem

* High School Transition Support
* Family Members and Support Worker
* Friends and Peers
* University Staff, Support and Resources

## Mesosystem

* Communication Barriers

## Exosystem

* Institutional Policies and Expectations
* Institutional Programs
  + Orientation
  + Peer Mentoring
* Autism-Friendly Spaces
* Staff Understanding of Autism
* Universal Design for Learning

## Macrosystem

* Cultural and Societal Change
* Understanding of Autism
* Attitudes Towards Autism, Disability, and Inclusion