



An Australian Government Initiative



Engaging Students on the Autism Spectrum in University Settings: An Evidence-Based Peer-Mentoring Program at Curtin University.



Why start a pilot program?



Study of 300 Australian adults with HFA/AS indicated that:

- 80% had tried tertiary study.
- 75% indicated they needed support.
- 50% indicated they received no or insufficient support.



Disability Officers reported:

- difficulties with verbal comprehension, planning, organisation, social awareness and group work.
- a general lack of awareness and understanding of autism among tertiary educators (Aspect, 2012).

What works at the tertiary education level?



(Hastwell, Harding, Martin & Baron-Cohen, 2013)



Curtin Specialist Mentoring Program History & How it Works





Duties of the Mentor

Participate in Autism training

Communicate regularly with their mentee

Understand their mentee's profile

Provide flexible and individualised support

Ensure mentee registered with Disability services and has a current assistance plan

Build on the mentee's short, medium and long term life goals

Link mentee to appropriate university services and clubs

Encourage mentee to attend Social Group

Increase mentee's academic success, independence, self-advocacy, employability over time.



What are CSMP mentee / mentor numbers?

Original pilot numbers at the beginning of 2014:

- 5 mentees / 9 specialist mentors (Postgrads - Psychology and OT)

Numbers at the end of 2014:

- 17 Mentees / 9 specialist mentors (Postgrads - Psychology and OT)

Present numbers mid 2016 :

- 40 mentees (and growing) / 30 specialist mentors (Postgrads - Psychology, OT, SP, CS & Eng.)
- Approx. 60,000 students enrolled at Curtin - potentially 600 with ASC.



First Pilot CSMP Evaluation – 2014 Mentee Perspective

10 Students with High Functioning ASC.

OUTCOME MEASURES: wellbeing and communication, retention and the academic performance of students with an ASC.

Interview data was also obtained to better tailor the programme to meet the needs of these students.

RESULTS: Significant improvement in mentees' sense of support / significant decrease in mentees' apprehension in communicating with others.

Mentees – highly satisfied with program – mean satisfaction score 4.31 out of 5.

High retention rate as nearly all 2014 Mentees indicated a desire for a 2015 Mentor.

Suggestions for improvements and changes for future implementations. (Siew et al., 2014; Paper in development).



Second Pilot CSMP Evaluation – Mentor Perspective

7 Participants from 9 CSMP student mentor group

Kilpatrick's model was used to evaluate the training

Level of Evaluation	Time administered	Evaluation Method	Outcome measured
Level 1	Immediately post-training	Questionnaire	Participant satisfaction with training.
Level 2	Immediately pre and post training	Questionnaire	Participant learning measured change in knowledge of Autism.
Level 3	3 months post training	Semi-structured interview	Application of knowledge to practice.



Second Pilot CSMP Evaluation Results

Mentor Satisfaction with Training

Overall the training was well received.

Overall Mean satisfaction was 4.7 (range 4.4 – 5) out of a total score of 5.



Application of knowledge

- Knowledge gained from training was instrumental in supporting their role.
- Particularly assisted them in understanding the sensory differences experienced by their mentees.
- Surprised at the prevalence of social anxiety among people with ASC.
- Helped them to empathise with their mentee.
- Weekly supervision meetings with coordinators were critical support to their role, particularly the frequent communication (weekly reports, speed of response to emails or telephone enquires).

(Hamilton, 2015; Hamilton, Stevens & Girdler, 2016).



Module Pilot Program (UWA – Sem. 2, 2015)

**7 Mentees
(Undergrad students on
the Autism Spectrum)**

**6 mentors
(All Postgrad Clin
Psych/PhD or Clin
Neuropsychology/PhD
candidates)**

**1 Coordinator (Clin
Psych./PhD student)**

**Mentors/Coordinator
paid for their time - 1
hour meeting and 1 hour
of supervision per week.**



Module Pilot Program (UWA – Sem. 2, 2015)

Mentees indicated they valued the program & would like to continue future involvement if program available.

Modified program is continuing in Semester 2, 2016, with lowered running costs.

Alternative more affordable model of service delivery suggested to ensure longevity of program.

Source voluntary Psych. mentors (honours year or last year of double degree) to provide extra professional practice opportunities.

Supervision of a PhD clinical psychology placement student within Disability Services divided between mentoring coordinator and counselling roles.



UWA Program / CSMP Autism CRC Evaluations (2015) Preliminary Results

Q-sort, pre and post-
questionnaires,
qualitative interviews
conducted with mentors
/ mentees / parents.

23 mentees
23 mentors
13 parents

12 full cases (3 parties)
9 mentee / mentor dyads
2 single mentees
3 single mentors

Of those transcribed and
who provided a rating -
Median evaluation score
8.5-9 out of 10
(range 8 – 9)

Comments focused on
importance of training /
supervision meetings.



UWA Program / CSMP Autism CRC Evaluations (2015) Preliminary Results

Mentees:

Benefits for mentees gathered through interviews included:

- Improved transitions into tertiary studies.
- Retention at university.
- Links to other university services.
- Academic performance (completing tasks in a timely and quality manner)
- Social outcomes.
- Personal development.
- Mental health / wellbeing.
- Confidence
- Independence.



UWA Program / CSMP Autism CRC Evaluations (2015) Preliminary Results

Mentors:

- Mentors described the program as intrinsically rewarding, and reported improved academic performance and personal development.

Parents:

- Parents identified improvements to their own quality of life as a result of the program.

Universities:

- Universities potentially experience benefits from the program in relation to student recruitment, academic performance and retention.



Autism CRC Module Components

Module has five separate sections:

- The *Program Coordinator Manual* for the Coordinator (PDF).
- The *Specialist Mentor Toolkit* for the Mentors (inclusive of the National Autistic Society [NAS] *Student Mentor Guidelines* and National Disability Coordination Officer Programme of Australia [NDCO] *Tertiary Education: Helpful Hints for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder*) (PDF).
- The *Mentee Information Booklet* for the Mentees (inclusive of the NDCO *Tertiary Education: Helpful Hints for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder*) (PDF).
- The *Specialist Peer Mentor Training Program* for the Coordinator (*PowerPoint*).
- The *Mentoring Module Forms, Samples & Templates* for the Coordinator (Word Document).



CSMP Achievements & Future Goals

Specialist Peer Mentoring Module based on Curtin / UWA experience now available on national CRC website.

To gain appropriate, recurrent funding to allow CSMP to continue operating in future years.

To gain philanthropic funding to provide scholarships and a dedicated specialist psychologist.

To improve CSMP over successive years based on evaluation results and stakeholder feedback.

To increase linkage of mentees with employment / work experience opportunities both on and off campus (Autism Academy).

To increase tertiary inclusive practice in relation to our students on the Autism Spectrum.



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<http://www.autismcrc.com.au/reports/peer-mentoring-program-university-students-autism-spectrum>