



# Specialist Peer Mentoring Module

Providing Support to Tertiary Students on the Autism Spectrum and Related Conditions



## Mentee Information Booklet

June 2016



Autism CRC Ltd Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism  
Level 3, Foxtail Building, Long Pocket Campus, The University of Queensland, Q 4072  
80 Meiers Road, Indooroopilly  
PO Box 6068, St Lucia Q 4067 | +61 7 3377 0600 | info@autismcrc.com.au  
ABN 55 162 632 180

[autismcrc.com.au](http://autismcrc.com.au)



Australian Government  
Department of Industry,  
Innovation and Science

**Business**  
Cooperative Research  
Centres Programme

**ISBN:** 978-0-9945809-7-9

Copies of this executive summary report, the associated mentoring modules and resources can be downloaded from the Autism CRC website [autismcrc.com.au](http://autismcrc.com.au)

**Suggested citation:** McDonald, J., Kidd, T., Ting Siew, C., Hamilton, J., Unwin, L., Thompson, C., Evans, K., Black, M., D'Arbrera, J., & Girdler, S.(2016) *Specialist Peer Mentoring Module: Mentee Information Booklet*. Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism, Brisbane Queensland.

#### **Copyright and Disclaimer**

The information contained in this report has been published by the Autism CRC to assist public knowledge and discussion to improve the outcomes for people with autism through end-user driven research. To this end, Autism CRC grants permission for the general use of any or all of this information provided due acknowledgement is given to its source. Copyright in this report and all the information it contains vests in Autism CRC. You should seek independent professional, technical or legal (as required) advice before acting on any opinion, advice or information contained in this report. Autism CRC makes no warranties or assurances with respect to this report. Autism CRC and all persons associated with it exclude all liability (including liability for negligence) in relation to any opinion, advice or information contained in this report or for any consequences arising from the use of such opinion, advice or information.

The Autism CRC Peer Mentoring Program evaluation reports and associated mentoring modules and resources are licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0). We encourage you to share or adapt this material in any medium or format if appropriate credit is given to Autism CRC and authors and any changes to the original are indicated.



**Dr Jasmine McDonald** BA DipEd MSpecEd (Hons) PhD (UWA)  
Founder & Joint Coordinator, Curtin Specialist Mentoring Program (CSMP), Curtin University  
Honorary Research Fellow, Telethon Kids Institute (UWA)

**Theresa Kidd** BPsych (Hons) MPsych PhD Candidate (Clinical Psychology)  
Founder & Joint Coordinator, Curtin Specialist Mentoring Program (CSMP), Curtin University

**Choo Ting Siew** BPsych (Hons) MPsych (Clinical Psychology)  
Curtin University

**Josette Hamilton** BPsych GradDipEd MPsych (Counselling Psychology)  
Curtin University

**Lisa Unwin** BPsych (Hons) MPsych PhD Candidate (Clinical Psychology)  
Project Manager, Specialist Peer Mentoring Program, University of Western Australia

**Craig Thompson** BPsych, MOT  
PhD Candidate (Occupational Therapy), School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work,  
Curtin University

**Kiah Evans** BSc (Occupational Therapy) (Hons) PhD Candidate (Occupational Therapy)  
Research Assistant, School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work, Curtin University

**Melissa Black** BSc (Occupational Therapy) (Hons) PhD Candidate (Occupational Therapy)  
Research Assistant, School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work, Curtin University

**Jemima D'Abrera** Talented CSMP Student Mentee responsible for producing image used on  
cover and in other parts of the document.

**Associate Professor Sonya Girdler** BSc (OT), MSc (OT), PhD  
Associate Professor (Research), School of Occupational Therapy & Social Work, Curtin  
University  
Project Leader, The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC)  
Director, Curtin Autism Research Group

The authors acknowledge the financial support of the Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC), established and supported under the Australian Government's Cooperative Research Centre Program. Staff and non-staff in kind were provided by Autism CRC participants – Curtin University and the University of WA.

### **The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC)**

The Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC) is the world's first national, cooperative research effort focused on autism. Taking a whole of life approach to autism focusing on diagnosis, education and adult life, Autism CRC researchers are working with end-users to provide evidence-based outcomes which can be translated into practical solutions for governments, service providers, education and health professionals, families and people with autism.

[autismcrc.com.au](http://autismcrc.com.au)

*“Going into university for the first time was challenging and scary yet exciting, all on its own. Struggling with new situations, structure and community made the mentoring program such a vital safety net and building bridge in becoming my own person and making a name for myself. Although I went into university with outside friends on the other side of campus, the program gave me a mentor that helped me make and keep friends in my degree and yet support me with regular conversations, meetings and information. I've been a part of programs like this before and nothing compares to the support, care and thrive for my success, it offers.”*

*(CSMP Mentee)*

*“The mentor program has given me more confidence in what I want to do when I leave university and has also given me something to look forward to during the week along with some new friends. It also allows me to seek help from those who understand my condition and have the ability to talk to someone when there is no one else to talk to. Plus being able to recognize people around campus makes the place feel less big and full of strangers.”*

*(CSMP Mentee)*

## WELCOME TO THE SPECIALIST PEER MENTORING PROGRAM

The Specialist Peer Mentoring Program is based on the successful Curtin University Specialist Mentoring Program (CSMP) situated in Perth, Western Australia – (<http://life.curtin.edu.au/health-and-wellbeing/autism-related-conditions-peer-mentoring.htm>), and is designed to specifically support students on the Autism Spectrum and related conditions in a tertiary education setting.

## WHY CHOOSE TO HAVE A MENTOR?

Research has shown that while tertiary students on the Autism Spectrum (and related conditions) can have particular academic strengths in their chosen study fields they may also experience difficulties with such areas as:

- Planning and organisation.
- Comprehension.
- Group work and oral presentations.
- Forming friendships and joining groups/activities.
- Seeking help / self-advocacy.
- Anxiety / depression.
- Gaining work experience / employment.

The Specialist Peer Mentoring Program has been specifically designed to support students on the Autism Spectrum and related conditions to improve their retention, academic success and well-being at university through the employment of a peer-mentoring program.

## WHAT IS A PEER MENTOR?

A peer mentor is a friendly, successful and experienced student who has received specific training in Autism Spectrum Conditions. Each student mentee is paired with a successful student peer mentor who is available to provide support and guidance according to their mentee's individual needs. Roberts (2000) defined mentoring as a

Formalised process whereby a more knowledgeable and experienced person actuates a supportive role of overseeing and encouraging reflection and learning within a less experienced and knowledgeable person, so as to facilitate that persons' career and development. (p.162)

Mentors work towards the long term goal of trying to help their mentee gain as much confidence, independence and self-advocacy as possible during their tertiary education in preparation for a more successful life.

## THE PEER MENTORING ROLE

*“Being a part of the mentoring program has been an incredibly rewarding, memorable and an invaluable learning experience. As a mentor, I had the honour of working with C., a first year student on the Autism Spectrum. Prior to working with the program, I knew little about the daily challenges and anxieties that those on the Autism Spectrum faced. However, working with C. has made me profoundly aware of how courageous these mentees are in confronting the challenge of university life. The program means that the mentees do not have to do it alone. I saw how the mentoring program provided the scaffolding and support needed for the mentees to adjust to university and develop meaningful friendships. I feel very proud and honoured to be involved in such a worthwhile project that makes such a difference in these students’ lives.”*

*(CSMP Mentor)*

According to Bebko, Schroeder, & Ames, (2011) who developed the ‘Asperger Mentorship Program’ for students on the Autism Spectrum in Canada:

The role of the mentor is akin to that of a “coach,”... A coach helps you practice skills, they help you prepare for the game, they cheer you along, and work with you after the game to talk about what went well and how to practice for the next game – but a coach does not play the game for or with you. This analogy is used to clarify that the role of the mentor is different from a counsellor or a friend. (p.5)

Using their own student success as a basis, your peer mentor will help ‘coach’ you and share ways to be a successful tertiary student. Your mentor understands that each person on the Autism Spectrum is different and will need support based on their individual strengths, needs and life goals. Before your mentor meets you, they will have had the opportunity to learn more about you from your intake form and other information you have provided to the Specialist Peer Mentoring Program.

Your mentor will communicate and/or meet with you for approximately one hour (or more) per week mainly during the teaching weeks of the semester. Meeting times and communication methods used will be determined by you and your mentor according to your individual circumstances.\* If you are an internal student, face-to-face communication is recommended so that your mentor can help familiarise you with campus life and help develop your social skills. Your mentor will also support and encourage you to make contact with appropriate staff, students and services on and

off campus to meet your individual needs. After the mentee/mentor pairings have been made, you will be notified as to your initial meeting arrangement with your mentor. This may take the form of an individual meeting or a 'Meet and Greet' meeting with other mentees and mentors.

**\*Please Note:** Facebook is not recommended as a personal communication method between the mentor and mentee because it has been found that it does not support professional boundaries to be established or maintained.

## References

Bebko, J. M., Schroeder, J. H., & Ames, M. E. (2011). *A mentoring program for students with Asperger and ASDs*. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.counselling.net/jnew/pdfs/handbooksmunualsguides/YORK%20UNIVERSITY,%20A%20Mentoring%20Program%20for%20Students%20with%20Asperger%20and%20ASDs.pdf>

Roberts A. (2000) Mentoring Revisited: a phenomenological reading of the literature. *Mentoring and Tutoring*, 8(2), 145-170.

## THE RESPONSIBILITIES CONTRACT

At the beginning of your involvement with the Specialist Peer Mentoring Program you and your mentor will be asked to sign a Responsibilities Contract outlining the boundaries of the mentor/mentee relationship. Prior experience has shown that difficulties can arise when appropriate professional boundaries have not been observed. While you will work as a friendly, cooperative team it is important that a respectful, professional distance between you and your mentor be established and maintained. At the end of the mentor/mentee relationship mentee and mentor pairs are free to establish a friendship if they both feel comfortable to do so. The Responsibilities Contract includes the following undertakings:

### Your Mentor's Responsibilities are to:

- Respect the professional boundaries between the mentor and the mentee.
- Respond ASAP to any communications from their mentee during the semester.
- Contact or meet their mentee at agreed times (and locations if applicable).
- Advise their mentee by email/text of any unavoidable changes to arrangements at least 24 hours in advance.
- Lodge a regular report documenting issues arising for supervision purposes.
- Communicate with their mentee in clear and specific terms providing a written and/or diagrammatic representation of the communication (if needed).

- Attend the Social Group (when possible) and regular supervision meetings to gain advice and guidance.
- Support their mentee to prepare their resume and seek out relevant work experience / work over time.
- Provide feedback about the program through participation in evaluation research.
- Provide guidance consistent with the defined role of a specialist student mentor.

**Your Responsibilities as a Mentee are to:**

- Respect the professional boundaries between the mentor and the mentee.
- Respond ASAP to any communications from your mentor during the semester.
- Contact or meet your mentor at agreed times (and locations if applicable).
- Advise your mentor by email/text of any unavoidable changes to arrangements at least 24 hours in advance.
- Try to attend any meetings requested including the Social Group.
- Work toward your own short, medium and long term life goals including employment.
- Communicate any difficulties you may be experiencing to your mentor (or the Coordinator should the need arise).
- Be open to try different techniques to improve difficulties you may be experiencing.
- Provide feedback about the program through participation in evaluation research.
- Contact your Coordinator if you are experiencing concerns / difficulties working with your mentor.



## THE SOCIAL GROUP

*“The mentoring program offers the mentees a rare opportunity to meet like-minded people their age and fosters the development of interpersonal relationships. There is a scarcity of such opportunities for adults on the spectrum. My mentee has been at University for 3 years and had never made any friends. He now attends the weekly social club meetings as well as plays cards with another mentee weekly. These social gatherings mean a lot to my mentee, he continually indicates that he wants to improve his social skills. I believe the mentoring program provides him with an opportunity to reach this goal.”*

*(CSMP Mentor)*

*“It is rewarding to see a group of strangers all become great friends by the end of semester. The social connections formed provide a valuable social support network for the mentees.”*

*(CSMP Social Group Coordinator)*

The Social Group is:

- A safe, welcoming social space for mentees to commune / make friends / practise social skills / experience belonging / decrease isolation.
- Coordinated and attended by mentees and mentors.
- Held regularly during the teaching weeks of the semester (details to follow).
- Advertised through a specific, private Social Group Facebook page (posting of events etc.) created and maintained by the Social Group Coordinating Committee.
- Organised in two parts:
  - A formal aspect (e.g. social skills, guest speakers etc.)
  - An informal aspect (e.g. electronic and board game playing).

The Social Group creates valuable opportunities for socialisation and a sense of belonging on campus. Please feel free to come along and be part of the fun! Please let the Coordinators know if you wish to be part of the Social Group and linked up to

the Social Group Facebook page. All mentees and mentors are welcome to be part of the organising committee.

*“My son is a first year University student studying Physics and Engineering. Being autistic, he finds it difficult to fit into general social environments, and consequently to make friends and feel accepted. However, the mentoring program has been instrumental in helping him settle into university life, alleviating the enormous stress he had initially been suffering. He has found guidance, support, friendship and understanding. The weekly social group meetings have also been a wonderful part of the program. They have been fun and informative and allowed my son to make friends and meet people who understand him, in a safe and supportive environment. Without this fantastic program he would still be feeling anxious and isolated.”*

*(Parent of 1st year CSMP Mentee)*

## MENTEES WHO GAIN THE MOST OUT OF THE PROGRAM

The CSMP experience has shown that those mentees who gain the most out of the Specialist Peer Mentoring Program are those who are:

- Committed to engage with the program fully and work with their mentor (and others) on a regular, timely basis during the teaching weeks of the semester.
- Proactive in setting and achieving their own short, medium and long term goals.
- Open to trying and practising different strategies to maximise their strengths and address their difficulties.

The CSMP experience has also shown that mentees can improve their academic results, gain scholarships, work experience, paid work and internships (in their fields of study) and progress along the trajectory of realising their life's goals when they fully engage with the Specialist Peer Mentoring Program.

## USEFUL RESOURCES

### **Publications (many authored by those on the Autism Spectrum)**

Attwood, S. (2008). *Making Sense of Sex: A Forthright Guide to Puberty, Sex and Relationships for People with Asperger's Syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Attwood, T. (2007). *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Attwood, T., Evans, C.R. & Lesko, A. (2014). *Been There. Done That. Try This!: An Aspie's Guide to Life on Earth*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Attwood, T. & Grandin, T. (2006). *Asperger's and Girls*. Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons.

Baker, J. (2006). *The Social Skills Picture Book for High School and Beyond*. Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons.

Brown, D. (2013). *The Aspie Girl's Guide to Being Safe with Men*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Dubin, N. (2009). *Asperger Syndrome and Anxiety: A Guide to Successful Stress Management*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Edmonds, G. & Worton, D. (2006). *The Asperger Social Guide*. London: Sage Publications.

Goodall, E. (2016) *The Autism Spectrum Guide to Sexuality and Relationships: Understand Yourself and Make Choices that are Right for You*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Grandin, T. (2006) *Thinking in Pictures and Other Reports from my Life with Autism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Grandin, T & Duffy, K. (2004). *Developing Talents: Careers for Individuals with Asperger Syndrome and High-Functioning Autism*. Shawnee Mission, Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.

Lawson, W. (2003). *Build Your Own Life: A Self-Help Guide For Individuals with Asperger Syndrome*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley.

Myles, B.S., Trautman, M.L. & Schelvan, R.L. (2004). *The Hidden Curriculum: Practical Solutions for Understanding Unstated Rules in Social Situations*. Shawnee Mission, Kansas: Autism Asperger Publishing Co.

Palmer, A. (2006) *Realizing the College Dream with Autism or Asperger Syndrome: A Parent's Guide to Student Success*. Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley.

Prince-Hughes, D. (2002). *Aquamarine Blue Five: Personal Stories of College Students with Autism*. Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press.

Purkis, J. (2006). *Finding a Different Kind of Normal: Misadventures with Asperger Syndrome*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Purkis, J. (2014). *The Wonderful World of Work: A Workbook for Asperiteens*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Purkis, J., Goodall, E. & Nugent, J. (2016) *Guide to Good Mental Health on the Autism Spectrum*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Santomauro, J. (2011). *Autism All-Stars: How We Use Our Autism and Asperger Traits to Shine in Life*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Shore, S.M. & Rastelli, L.G. (2006). *Understanding Autism for Dummies*. Hoboken, NJ; Wiley Publishing.

Simone, R. (2010). *Asperger's on the Job*. Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons.

Willey L.H. (1999). *Pretending to be Normal*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Willey L.H. (2012). *Safety Skills for Asperger Women: How to Save a Perfectly Good Female Life*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

### **DVDs**

Radtke, M. (2012). A 9<sup>th</sup> Planet Video Behavior Modeling Course. USA: 9<sup>th</sup> Planet.

Saines, G. & Jackson, J. (2010). *Temple Grandin*. USA: HBO Films.

### **Websites**

<http://www.autismcrc.com.au/>

<http://www.tonyattwood.com.au/>

[www.templegrandin.com/](http://www.templegrandin.com/)

[www.facebook.com/autismdiscussionpage](http://www.facebook.com/autismdiscussionpage)

[www.suelarkey.com.au/](http://www.suelarkey.com.au/)

<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc/>

<http://www.autismresearchcentre.com/>

<http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/consumers.cfm>

<http://www.autism.org.uk/>

<http://www.autism-uni.org/>

<http://www.autism.com/>

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/>

**Please Note:**

<http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/consumers.cfm>

Centre for Clinical Interventions (CCI) WA website (Consumer Resources Section) – provides online modules on Social Anxiety, Worrying, Assertiveness, Depression etc. that may be useful to a mentee depending upon their individual needs.

<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc/>

Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) provides information on supporting tertiary students diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC), their parents, and tertiary staff interested in learning more about ASCs. This information pertains to supporting students on the Autism Spectrum in academic settings and comes from a variety of sources including local and international information, peer reviewed research and research conducted at OTARC. The information provided is general and not targeted for specific tertiary institutions.

<http://www.autism-uni.org/>

Autism & Uni is a multinational EU-funded project that helps greater numbers of young adults on the Autism Spectrum to gain access to Higher Education (HE) and to navigate the transition successfully. They have created FREE resources that HE Institutions across Europe can adopt. These include a set of Best Practice Guides for HE managers, academics and support staff. The guides are written in an accessible way and inform staff about Autism in the HE context, what is considered good practice and what staff can do to support autistic students well. There is also an Online Toolkit for students to give them the information and strategies needed to manage the transition to university.

**Computer Applications (as recommended by CSMP mentors and mentees)**

- **Lost on Campus** (Free App. - Australia's biggest campus mapping app, with 42 campuses and over 36,000 locations).
- **Smiling Mind** (Free App. - Modern mediation program developed by psychologists for young people).
- **Anti-Social** (Small cost to buy App. - Makes it easy to target and block any distracting websites).
- **Procrastination** (Free App. - for all procrastinators).
- **SafeZone** (Free App. - for all students and staff that connects directly to the university security team while on campus).
- **MindShift** (Free App. for young adults to help learn ways to relax, develop more helpful ways of thinking, and identify active steps that will help take charge of anxiety. This app includes strategies to deal with everyday anxiety, as well as specific tools to tackle: Test Anxiety, Perfectionism, Social Anxiety, Performance Anxiety, Worry, Panic, Conflict).

- **Friendmaker** (Small cost to buy App. - companion to Dr E. Laugeson's book, *The Science of Making Friends*, and contains important skills, strategies, role-play videos, and tools for making and keeping friends based on guidance from the UCLA Peers program).

### **Tertiary Education: Helpful Hints for Individuals on the Autism Spectrum**

To help with your transition to tertiary study you will be issued with a booklet titled *Tertiary Education: Helpful Hints for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder* produced by the National Disability Coordination Officer Programme (NDCO) of Australia. Please take the time to familiarise yourself with the booklet as it covers the following important areas:

- Awareness of yourself and others.
- Knowing your strengths.
- Familiarising yourself with the campus.
- Studying at university or TAFE.
- Organising your study.
- What support could be helpful.
- Finding key people who can help you.
- Communication tips.
- Managing stress and anxiety.

The NDCO *Tertiary Education: Helpful Hints for People with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Transition to Tertiary - Short Version PRINT)* can also be downloaded through [www.adcet.edu.au/autism-transition](http://www.adcet.edu.au/autism-transition)