



Adulthood

## 'Hear' to help - Chatbot



### Background

Evidence suggests that young autistic people that continue their education post-secondary school have better life outcomes than their autistic peers.

A recent Australian survey found that students on the autism spectrum who used support systems had a better overall university experience, but that there was low usage of the support systems available.

Reported reasons were both academic and non-academic factors, but reluctance to use support systems was related to previous bad experiences or poor self-advocacy skills.

#### Why a chatbot?

A chatbot would allow the student to explore a range of support resources from the comfort of their own phone, potentially improving self-advocacy skills and enhancing the use of available support systems, without increasing the workload of the staff providing support services.

#### What is a chatbot?

A chatbot is a natural language processing program that takes utterances and applies a set of rules to derive an appropriate response.

The response is drawn from a 'brain', which is developed to contain information relevant to a specific population group.

The chatbot is deployed through an app on a smart device or through a web page.



### Aim

This project aimed to develop a chatbot prototype by building a 'brain' using existing resources and refined through conversations with, and feedback from, young adults on the spectrum, their peers and advocates.



### Who took part?

- Curtin Specialist Mentoring Program (CSMP) staff, mentees and mentors
- Autism Academy for Software Quality Assurance (AASQA)
- Wider autism community members recruited through Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) and the Autism Hub (Department of Education Queensland)
- A Community Advisor oversaw participant engagement



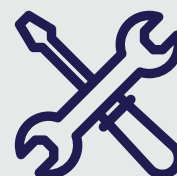
### How we did the research



Focus groups



Remote portals for programming and testing



Workshops

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What did we find?

This project produced a working chatbot that can be used by students on the autism spectrum and related conditions to facilitate participation in tertiary education.

The chatbot has the following features:



Allows users to navigate social, physical and environmental cues associated with higher education



Provides information on anxiety, depression and university counselling services.



Is available for smart phone or web use and provides relevant resources sourced from student support services and health services



Provides communication strategies for various scenarios, such as asking for an extension or understanding legal rights



Who did the research?



Curtin University



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Find out more

Download the evaluation report and executive summary on the Autism CRC website:

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

