



Chris Varney
Founder The I CAN Network

ican.network/schools/

'I CAN Network's Rethink of Autism'

Chris Varney is Founder and Chief Enabling Officer of the I CAN Network, Australia's first social enterprise established by people on the Spectrum. I CAN runs a suite of mentoring programs across schools, universities, TAFEs, businesses and communities through which young professionals on the Spectrum mentor kids and teenagers on the Spectrum. Chris' inspiration to establish I CAN came from his own network of mentors that supported him to get the best out of his Asperger's.

Chris has a strong background in advocating for children's rights. With World Vision, Chris has held roles including Youth Ambassador, VGen Co-Director and Manager of Youth Supporters. With the Australian Government, Chris served as the 2009 Australian Youth Ambassador to the UN. Chris has a law degree and is a former recipient of the National Children's Rights Award.

I CAN Network's 'I CAN Schools' program creates school communities that benefit from embracing Autism. This is achieved through a whole-of-school approach.

Student group mentoring

The program starts with directly mentoring students on the Spectrum on a fortnightly basis. The mentoring is unique because it is largely delivered by young adults on the Spectrum who have successfully become mentors with I CAN. The content of the mentoring sessions focuses on teamwork, personal strengths, 'I CAN' talks, communication and interpersonal skills, planning and organising, innovation projects and stress management.

Motivational talks on resilience and leadership

Mentors also deliver motivational talks on leadership and resilience to the wider student body in an effort to make school safer for students on the Spectrum.

Professional development

An I CAN School also benefits from 'Quiet Magic Method' which is I CAN's way of setting up people for success. It's a customised workshop designed by graduates on the Spectrum that aims to give teachers more practical, real-world stories and learning on how to embrace a learner's Autism for their social and emotional wellbeing and their academic success.

Across Victoria, 11 schools (including Catholic, government and specialist schools) have come on board the program in just 18 months.

You can view Chris' TEDx on his 'I CAN Network' here: [youtube.com/watch?v=T1HQKB2txgY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1HQKB2txgY)