

INFORMATION SHEET 1

AUTISM CONNECT EARLY (ACE) PROGRAMME

Our partnership with UNE is one that will have a practical implication for early intervention programmes and will bring about societal change.

These findings come from my thoughts, my research, and my experience as I reflect and continue on this autism journey.



MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN THE PROGRAMME AN ACE OBJECTIVE

It has been my observation that, whilst inclusion of all children is a valued goal and one we are dedicated to, it is not always achievable for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) children in general mainstream settings. Therefore the underpinning ethos of the ACE programme is to provide meaningful participation tailored to the needs of these children.

The programme is focused on using the research evidence to develop innovative educational approaches for children with autism. To achieve this, we have partnered with the University of New England (UNE) to embed continued review and evaluation across ACE experiences so that we obtain an objective measure of how children are developing and growing.

When developing lifelong learning skills, we believe that it is important to introduce all children to the world holistically. Along with the typical developmental skills that are learnt, neurotypical and neurodiverse children who immerse themselves in the ACE Programme will learn empathy, social connectedness, sharing and understanding, and a way to develop awareness of and support for their peers. This learning will help create lifelong positive social connections.

Our hope is that these skills will support children through their school life, on to college and the wider community. Our capacity building programming allows neurodiverse and neurotypical children to develop with an awareness of diversity, thus enabling them to be positive contributing members in our social world. Meaningful participation ensures that we promote a healthy mental lifestyle by bringing awareness to the needs of others by modelling how we can support each other and connect in an ever-changing world.

ACE aims:

- a. Meaningful participation based on the competencies, interests, and tolerances of autistic children with a focus on 'whole child' and 'whole world' learning experiences;
- b. Skill-building across key domains such as physical, sensory, social by exposing children to a range of age-level and developmental-level experiences involving play, movement, pre-academics; and
- c. Learning via social connection and relationships with educators and peers.