

## ACU launches groundbreaking autism inclusion program

In celebration of World Autism Awareness Day this Friday, Australian Catholic University (ACU) is delighted to announce the launch of its autism inclusion program.

ACU has collaborated with autistic students and staff from the university and other higher education institutions to develop Autism at Uni, an innovative range of initiatives designed to support autistic students in their studies and help ease their transition into the higher education environment. The program has been developed by autistic people, including an advisory group of autistic students and alumni.

The Autism at Uni program recognises that every person with autism is an individual with different strengths and challenges, and encourages students to use different aspects of support depending on their individual interests and needs.

Autism at Uni features the (Uni)Life-Hacker mentor program. A Life-Hacker mentor is a student who has been studying at ACU over a period of time and can assist students with understanding assignments, interacting with teaching staff, finding their way around campus, and getting the most out of their university experience.

Other aspects of the program include social activities, a dedicated web page for current and future students, a resource section on the student portal, professional development for staff, and opportunities for research students to contribute to the development of the program.

To further support autistic students as they transition to university life, ACU's Melbourne campus has a dedicated low-sensory room that autistic students can access during the day. This quiet space has resources to help manage the challenges faced during university attendance including stim toys, textured objects, and reference books.

ACU has further committed to providing inclusion equity to its students by establishing an Autism Inclusion Equity Scholarship. The \$4,000 scholarship will benefit autistic students commencing studies at our Blacktown Campus.

ACU Pro Vice Chancellor of Engagement Professor Sandra Jones said, "As an autistic person, I am excited to lead this project which will help us to address some of the inequities in education and employment outcomes for our community. I am proud to work at a university that recognises not only the challenges but also the strengths of autistic people".

ACU Vice President Father Anthony Casamento csma said, "The Autism at Uni program is an innovative and groundbreaking program for the higher education sector in Australia. ACU is proud to be playing a lead role in recognising the unique gifts that our autistic staff and students bring to enhance our learning communities."

To discover more about ACU's Autism Inclusion Program visit [www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/autism-at-acu](http://www.acu.edu.au/about-acu/autism-at-acu)

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