I CAN Network

**What does an I CAN program session look like?**

Founder & CEO - Chris Varney

Well anyone who walked past one of our sessions would tend to think that we're just in there playing games and mucking around and we do have a lot of fun but the topics and games and activities that we do are all quite targeted at things that people on the spectrum are typically thought of as not being good at or struggling with like communication and stress and anxiety management, and so, you know, we do a lot of games where you have to describe things in a tricky way and that makes people think outside the box which people on the spectrum are very, very good at.

So the session would be me coming in playing a game of hangman at the start or a different game kind of like that might be celebrity had something else and then we do a round of good news where everyone has to tell us something good they've done this week or something they're looking forward to a lot of time that positive language is really strange to the kids at the start. So I have to say something positive because I am one of them are dealing with some pretty severely negative attitudes towards school and their lives in general. Also being jaded is considered cool, so just having to put things positively can be a real, a real battle at the start, but they get the hang of it eventually.

Then we might do a game of silent ball where everyone has to throw the ball to each other and communicate non-verbally That their intention is to throw the ball little things like that, and we'll do an interview game and I have to ask each other questions and they have to they have to answer. Or one game I'm particularly fond of is they have a picture of a lego structure in the pieces of the Lego and then one person has to describe what they're meant to build and the others have to do it with their instructions. When I was in high school if there was a bunch of autistic people getting together to do that kind of activity would have been laughable, that would never work, but the kids love it. They look forward to the sessions.

I've had one two kids coming who are engaged more at school because they get to come to I CAN that's what their teachers and told me. They're actually talking about this all week and then when we don't run over the Christmas holidays and come back we might not start up for four or five weeks because everyone's getting back in the swing of things, they're saying when are we starting I CAN? When are we starting I CAN.

Also before and after the sessions the kids are rocking up early and staying late to just chat with us because they want to know about my special interests and they want to tell me about theirs, so many kids showing me all the Pokemon they've caught this week. But just having these nerdy chats about different things and then getting to engage with an adult on the spectrum. Who's someone who they can look at as a way that they might actually one day be able to be in the world. It's such a confidence boost for us.

Because they're they're growing up in a world where they see adults on TV and their parents and friends and things like that, but they don't see autistic adults. They actually probably do they just don't know it, but they go God, how am I going to be in that place, there's no framework for them and that's what I CAN, can do really informally as well as formally just from meeting us.