

Date 1 February 2012

Subject New drama club to build social skills for teens with Asperger's and Autism

Drama is the focus of a new Hunter-based social club designed to teach young people with Asperger's and High Functioning Autism new skills that can enhance their social engagement.

The eight-week drama club, funded by nib foundation and facilitated by Firstchance Inc, provides teenagers with the opportunity to work together in a structured and fun format, helping to strengthen their ability to build friendships, and improve confidence and self-esteem.

Firstchance General Manager, Darleen Taylor, said the activities help participants gain a better understanding of social cues and expectations, allowing them to better interact with peers.

"Young people with Asperger's and High Functioning Autism often struggle with basic social skills such as making eye contact, controlling their voice, listening and working with others in a social setting," Ms Taylor said.

"This program aims to advance these basic social skills, which will in turn provide participants with increased feelings of connection to their peers, parents and the others in the community, making them feel more engaged and reducing the sense of loneliness," she added.

The nib foundation funding will also help launch a support group to provide an opportunity for parents of children with Asperger's and High Functioning Autism to access to additional support materials and strategies to assist their family.

"During our pilot program we received an overwhelming response from parents who said their children had developed new friendships, sometimes for the first time, which has opened up a whole new world for them," Ms Taylor said.

nib foundation Chairman, Terry Lawler said the foundation was delighted to assist young people from the Hunter with Asperger's and High Functioning Autism to develop into confident adults with positive mental health.

"The drama club provides a safe and supportive environment for these teenagers to build foundation skills that can be utilised at school and socially to help them actively engage in these settings," Mr Lawler said.

Almost 50 young people, aged 13-16 years, will take part in the new club throughout the year which welcomes its first intake in the Newcastle next week. Additional clubs will also be held throughout the year in Lake Macquarie and Port Stephens.

Limited places are still available in the first social club. Anyone interested in taking part is encouraged to contact Kim Talbot on 4921 8723 or email kim.talbot@newcastle.edu.au for an application form.

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