Hi, everyone. It's a pleasure to join this Autism MOOC. My name's Chris Varney. I'm national director of an organisation called the I CAN Network, which is a movement of young people on the spectrum driving a rethink of autism from 'I can't' to 'I can'.

The second transition that's really key is when a young person is leaving a secondary system into a tertiary qualification or vocational training. Some of the frightening data out there in a country like Australia, where I'm from, says that only 81% of young people, young Australians on the spectrum have a post-school qualification. That means that overwhelmingly, the system... you know, these young people are just falling through the system. They might work within the rubric and rigidity of a year 12, and then the great unknown of what happens in a tertiary institution or in vocational training - we're not nurturing them and walking them through that transition period. And what's involved in that part is very much networking them, is creating experiences that network them with universities, with students who might be on the spectrum in universities, and also with employers that can give them a real sense of where their skills - and they have so many creative skills - where they might be tapped by the labour market. And so the real work that's ahead of an organisation like I CAN, which I run, is about creating experiences where you are putting employers and young people on the spectrum together and really encouraging employers to customise job opportunities that match the talents of these young people with business or community needs. Because often young people on the spectrum can be... you know, can be quite advanced in the workplace, depending on the project they might be working on.

The focus that they can bring to a project that they're on can be quite extraordinary. I know employers that will deliberately seek out young people on the spectrum to be their graduates, because they know that they bring a certain level of focus and ability to remember in detail a particular subject that is of great value to the project that they're working on. And so it is not necessarily about endlessly teaching these young people skills, because you need skills, but you also
need a sense of purpose and you also need networks. And it's the networks that we need to create for young people on the spectrum. So many of them are getting through their schooling, their secondary schooling, but so few of them are taking further pathways, because we're not networking them properly. We're not creating those proper moments for them to network with employers and for employers to see the amazing talent that they have. And the reason that's not happening, when you really boil it down, is because there is still an overwhelming stigma towards autism and a lack of understanding of what it is, and that's where organisations like I CAN, that are about that rethink of autism from 'I can't' to 'I can', really play that role. And so the more we introduce these talents of young people on the spectrum to employers and the more employers can see how, you know, their whole value proposition as a workplace might be this amazing focus that young people can bring, the better off that we will be.