

Media Release

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AUTISM LEADERSHIP BLUEPRINT:

Australia's First Future Leaders program for people with Autism Spectrum Disorders

The *Future Leaders program*, a unique, visionary and ambitious program aims to equip young Australians with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) to develop self advocacy skills and make a significant contribution to next years landmark Asia Pacific Autism Conference.

The program and a specially developed survey for adults with autism is being launched today by Ms Judy Brewer, autism parent advocate and Ambassador for the Asia Pacific Autism Conference.

The program is a first for any conference of this nature, and will provide pre-conference familiarisation, socialisation, information, training and professional support, enabling young adults with an ASD to participate more fully in next year's Asia Pacific Autism Conference (APAC 2013) in Adelaide in August 2013.

The conference theme is *True Colours – Be Bold, Be Brave, Be Brilliant!*

'It's hoped that a large group of young adults with autism, like my son Harrison, will be able to participate at APAC 2013 and gain new skills as a result of the program. A web based survey, face to face gatherings, a web based group and an embedded program within the main conference program will help many to attend and contribute their knowledge and experience and we will all be much richer for this.' Judy Brewer, APAC 2013 Ambassador said

Participation rates of people with an ASD at events such as state autism conferences and the biennial national autism conference are generally less than 2% of attendance.

The APAC 2013 *Future Leaders program* recognises that by the very nature of the condition, the voice of people with autism is rarely heard even in forums and groupings organised and attended by autism families, service providers and autism trained professionals.

A targeted survey has been developed to assist conference organisers to identify barriers and respond to suggestions during the planning process. The *Future Leaders* survey can be found at <http://www.apac13.org.au/>

"Investment in our future leaders is something that leads to enrichment of both the lives of individuals and the fabric of our communities. Empowerment leads to more satisfying and safer lives" said Katharine Annear, Autistic Self Advocacy Network Australia

The program is supported by parents and Autistic self advocates and has already excited great interest from key autism groupings and service providers.

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ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder affecting 1 in every 160 people. For Information about ASD go to the conference host Autism South Australia <http://www.autismsa.org.au/>