

Supporting People with Diverse Needs in Higher Education



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In this presentation I will outline how I have overcome my anxiety and gained confidence as a person with autism to study at the tertiary level. I will also outline some accessible teaching strategies that have supported me in my learning.

In June 2023 I joined Toastmasters which is an International organisation that promotes diversity of membership across 149 countries. It helped me to gain confidence by improving my public speaking skills. I learned where to pause when speaking and how to breathe when feeling anxious. As part of my toastmasters membership, I was allocated a mentor who helped me to understand projects, how to complete speeches and how to ask lecturers for help if unsure about what is expected in assignments. Toastmasters also provided me with learning incentives to undertake three learning pathways that built up my skills for which I gained recognition with a proficient pin on completion.

Gaining confidence through Toastmasters to participate in third level group activities has reduced my stress as a student however equally important is how lecturing staff present their material. I will outline a series of action-based teaching strategies that have made my learning less likely to cause me tension. These include: use of easy read print, large print, additional tutorial support, use of visual aids, case studies, practice assessments, group assessment and extra time to complete assignments.

Biography:

Sarah Butler is a person that lives with autism. She is a member of several groups that advocate for and do research with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She has spoken at many conferences both in Australia and internationally. She has a Diploma in Disability and is called upon by tertiary institutions to speak on what it means to live with autism.