ANTS Social Skills Program: “Improving First Impressions”

‘Social skills’ refers to the range of verbal and non-verbal behaviours involved in communicating and interacting with others. Individuals with cognitive impairments commonly experience impaired social skills. Thus, reintegration and participation in the community is often faced with difficulty. Evidence-based and structured social skills training has been shown to be effective in improving peoples’ ability to successfully engage with others.

**What is the ANTS Social Skills Program?**

We have adopted the “Improving First Impressions” training program at ANTS. The aim of this program is to improve the social skills of individuals who have cognitive impairments, in order to assist with their social reintegration. The program aims to maximise social skills and encourage participation in everyday contexts.

Relevant cognitive deficits (e.g. attention, memory, social perception) and mental health concerns (e.g. self-esteem, confidence) are addressed alongside social skills training to assist with the individual’s continued improvement in social situations.

**Program Structure**

There are two options for completing this course:

1. Once weekly two-hour group sessions for 12 weeks plus a pre-intervention individual assessment and post-intervention individual assessment/feedback session, totalling 14 sessions. Cost = POA
2. As per 1. plus once weekly individual sessions to tailor program content to your specific needs and goals. This totals 26 sessions. Cost = $3,750

Group content includes:

- Making introductions
- Listening and watching
- Starting a conversation
- Developing, maintaining and ending a conversation
- Topic selection
- Giving and accepting compliments
- Being assertive – Saying no
- Being assertive – Joining in
- Asking for and offering to help
- Coping with disagreements

**Who would benefit from the ANTS Social Skills Program?**

The program was designed to assist individuals who struggle in social contexts due to cognitive impairments. Individuals who experience difficulty in following, learning and applying complex cognitive strategies will benefit from this program.

This training is applicable to individuals who experience cognitive impairments due to wide range of clinical, sub-clinical or medical conditions. These include, but are not limited to: brain injuries, mild intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, schizophrenia, autism and Asperger’s syndrome.