



Randa Habelrih is an author, speaker, inclusion advocate and advisor. She is the author of the book **“Dealing with Autism”** and Founder of **MATES**.

Randa’s experience in working daily with the challenges of raising a child with special needs, sparked her passion to help others understand the unique needs of fellow parents, teachers and health care professionals. She has trained in various methodologies designed to assist children living with autism, including Doman Therapy, the Son-Rise Program and Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA).

Randa now speaks at schools, universities and conferences fostering the leadership skills of her audience and facilitates a shift from AWARENESS of people living with social exclusion to their INCLUSION.

This mission was triggered after her son experienced a heartbreaking bullying incident at school. Deciding to speak directly to his peers via social media, she created a YouTube video asking them to be **kind** to her son. <https://youtu.be/m3Nw7H6DqBU>. The video received a huge response from mothers and teachers; it also won a prize in the NOVA short film competition but more importantly his peers saw it.

The book “Dealing With Autism” was the next part of the response to this incident but it wasn’t enough to just share the narrative, “as a society we need to be proactive and encourage genuine, practical inclusion for our children.”

Following the successful launch of her book, Randa pioneered School MATES and is currently introducing it into Australian schools. MATES is an acronym for Mates Assisting To Engage Socially and is a peer led social inclusion and leadership program, which fosters interaction and a sense of belonging at school. Social Inclusion is critical in developing the confidence and self esteem of all students; this program can be applied to all students, not only those on the autism spectrum.

Randa has extrapolated the MATES concept and is working at shining the spotlight via her Model MATES project; whereby models of differing abilities strut their stuff alongside professional models. High fashion and modeling usually present an elite, glamorous, unattainable ideal of perfection... Model MATES is about presenting an alternative vision.

Randa is an engaging speaker and presenter. She uses a powerful blend of story, research and lived experience to transform her audience and empower them with the knowledge that they possess the leadership skills to instigate change and powerfully implement practical social justice in their own community. She is also an adviser,



currently being involved in an advisory committee to the shadow minister for disability and also having sat on the governance committee for “The Eileen O’Conner School for Students with Special Needs”, the Sydney CEO’s first purpose built school for students with special needs. Additionally she is an advisor and advocate for parents who experience challenges with their children’s schooling.

Qualified in many areas, Randa holds a Bachelor of Commerce degree, has lectured at The University of NSW and Kenvale College on Marketing Management and also Consumer Behaviour and over the years has worked with big brand companies such as Estee Lauder, Lancôme, Ralph Lauren, Myer, David Jones in her previous role as National Marketing Manager of a multinational cosmetics company.

Randa has also worked and travelled extensively in her role as tour director with Harvest Journeys accompanying groups internationally. These groups have included school groups, teacher groups, also leadership and principal groups. She is passionate about working with youth and has accompanied thousands of Australia’s young people to World Youth Days in Rio, Sydney and Madrid; she has also facilitated voluntary mission work in Lima, Peru and Fiji. Randa has recently realised a life-long goal of walking hundreds of kilometres along the ancient route of The Camino to reach Santiago de Compostela in Spain.

Randa lives in Sydney with her husband Elias and two children. Their daughter Emily recently graduated with a Masters in Clinical Psychology and is currently working as a psychologist specialising in autism spectrum disorder. Their son Richard, despite a very poor prognosis has achieved beyond what was imagined by professionals. His achievements include:

- Graduating High School
- Represents Sydney eastern region in Special Olympics Basketball
- Won an Australian Government Vocational Student Prize in national recognition of outstanding achievement and excellence in secondary education
- Works at Eastcourts Tennis Club and also at Café Bacetti
- Active in a local community service project of feeding the homeless
- Speaks at conferences. Past speaking engagements include: Autism in Education Conference, Lifestart Conference, Holdsworth Gala Fundraiser, Book Launch, Dymocks Autism and Me Event, The Scots College, Sydney
- Has modeled in the inaugural Model MATES event