

# eyes on autism



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# A WORD FROM OUR CEO

**We've enjoyed an exciting start to the year, with construction for our new centre in Adelaide now underway, the launch of this year's Take a Hike Series and the introduction of a new campaign, 'Let's get AWESOME for autism. We've also just hosted our biennial Gala Ball, which was a tremendous night and I thank all of the attendees for supporting the evening. To top it off, we are thrilled to have been the major beneficiary for the Rotary Art Spectacular, for the fourth consecutive year. To date, this event has raised more than \$100,000 for the children we care for.**

AEIOU has also welcomed new General Manager, Greg Johnson, who, reporting to the Board will oversee our Operations, Human Resources, Finance and Corporate Affairs departments. Greg is a finance services professional with extensive experience in the corporate sector, and we're thrilled to welcome him to the team.

In other news, we're preparing to relocate to a new central office location. Many of you know our central office team is spread across three offices, and we are delighted to have the opportunity to bring everybody together in one location. Our new

office is based in Woolloongabba, and we're grateful to receive assistance for the fit-out from Hutchinson Builders and our office furniture from the Queensland Government, helping to keep costs to a minimum.

With the NDIS rollout underway, we have a solid plan in place to support our families as they navigate the Scheme. Along with advocating for the autism community, we host regular, free, information nights to share up to date, relevant information. Further, we've been delighted to appoint an NDIS Support Worker to assist families in a one-on-one capacity and to work alongside NDIS planners and representatives. Katrina Ives, who has coordinated enrolments for six years with AEIOU Foundation has taken on this role, and is in an excellent position to support parents and caregivers within this capacity.

Each year, we support awareness initiatives to mark Autism Awareness Month, and this year we asked our families to describe their experience with AEIOU Foundation in one word. The responses we received were overwhelming, and serve as another reminder for why we deliver our program and what makes it special. At AEIOU, we provide a community, understanding, support and one of Australia's best and most effective early intervention programs. We know families expect to receive quality early intervention when they enrol their children in our program. But it's good to know they also find hope, confidence, joy, acceptance, connection, happiness and laughter.

Many of you have supported AEIOU Foundation for a number of years. Some of you may be new to our community, but I want all of you to know your support makes a direct impact on the lives of the children we care for. Every dollar counts and all funds go directly to resourcing our centres and creating excellent therapy and learning opportunities for the children in our care.

With your help, AEIOU has emerged as one of Australia's leading providers of Early Intervention, but there's more we need to do. If you can donate to this year's Winter Appeal, you will be helping us to create life-changing opportunities for the children we care for. Read on to hear from some of the families who have benefited from our service and to see what's in store for the year ahead.

Yours sincerely

**Alan Smith**  
CEO  
AEIOU Foundation



# BRONCOS BRING JOY

**There were smiles all round when the Brisbane Broncos paid a visit to our Nathan centre recently.**

Players Korbin Sims and Tevita Pangai Jnr showed a real interest in the AEIOU program, spending time touring the centre and talking to staff about the importance of early intervention.

Centre manager Sarah Sword said the real highlight was seeing the players engage with children and families.

"They were genuinely interested in what we do at AEIOU, and it was clear they gained a real understanding," Sarah says.

"It was fabulous watching them play with the children, passing the footy, blowing bubbles and playing games. For staff and parents, it was particularly pleasing watching the children using their developing social and communication skills with the players."

The Brisbane Broncos are long-term supporters of AEIOU Foundation. This year, and many previously, AEIOU Foundation is a beneficiary of the Brisbane Broncos Charities Fund 50-50 raffle.



## INTRODUCING OUR NEW GENERAL MANAGER



**To support AEIOU Foundation's continuing growth and development, the Board has appointed General Manager Greg Johnson to the Executive Management Team.**

Greg oversees the strategic direction of AEIOU Foundation's Finance, Operations, Corporate Affairs and People and Culture departments, while responding to the operational needs of the organisation.

As a financial services professional with extensive experience, most recently as Queensland Divisional Director at Macquarie Bank, Greg also has more than 10 years' Board experience in the healthcare (not-for-profit) sector.

His community involvement includes being on the Board of the Royal Brisbane Women's Hospital Foundation and as a volunteer with social enterprises including the 139 Club, which provides meals for those at risk.

As General Manager, Greg is committed to ensuring every child and family at AEIOU Foundation is supported by excellent therapy and care throughout their early intervention journey.

"I look forward to working with families, staff and stakeholders to ensure AEIOU Foundation continues to be leaders in delivering effective and affordable early intervention for children with autism," Greg says.

"With two new centres under construction, and more in the pipeline, this is an exciting time to come on board."

AEIOU Chief Executive Officer Alan Smith agrees.

"With the introduction of the NDIS, and expansion plans underway, we are at a critical point in realising our vision to ensure every child is given the best opportunity to reach their full potential," Alan says.

"I look forward to working with Greg to achieve our goals."

## AEIOU BRIGHTON TO OPEN THIS YEAR

**The South Australian beachside suburb of North Brighton is set to become home to AEIOU Foundation's newest early intervention centre for children with autism, with construction now underway.**

The \$2.3m AEIOU centre will support 40 children with moderate to severe autism each year, and was made possible through an \$891,000 grant received from the National Stronger Regions Fund (NSRF) and donation of land by Minda under a long-term lease.

The 720m<sup>2</sup> purpose-built centre will house four classrooms, therapy rooms, a motor skills room, parents' retreat, and 160m<sup>2</sup> roofed outdoor play facilities, all of which will play an important role in the development of a child's communication, social and behaviour skills. The centre will be run by a transdisciplinary team of therapists and skilled educators.

AEIOU CEO Alan Smith said the centre is being constructed in response to calls by South Australian families.

"Since opening our first AEIOU centre in Adelaide in 2014, we have provided affordable and effective autism specific early intervention to more than 40 South Australian families. Our new centrally located Brighton centre will ensure even more children will have access to life-changing early intervention programs and receive the ongoing support they need.

"AEIOU sincerely thanks the National Stronger Regions Fund (NSRF) for its significant financial contribution to this project, and to disability support partner Minda for their generous donation of the parcel of land on which we will be located."

Minda CEO, Cathy Miller, welcomed the start of construction of the AEIOU Centre and Stage 2 of its broader \$160m+ Master Plan development.

"Minda's Master Plan aims to create a vibrant community hub that offers leading edge accommodation and support for South Australians of all ages with a disability, and we are pleased to align with AEIOU Foundation because it shares very similar values and opens up the prospect of future collaboration in areas such as research, training and development," Ms Miller said.

"With the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme it is now more critical than ever to establish partnerships with other sector-leading organisations like AEIOU to complement our own support model, and ensure that South Australians and their families receive whole-of-life support over time if they need," she said.

Long-time supporters Hutchinson Builders and Buchan Group architects are working on the project, which is expected to be completed late this year.



# SEIZING THE FUTURE IN AUTISM RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT

**AEIOU Foundation's research and assessment team, overseen by Dr Madonna Tucker, is responsible for engaging in research to increase our knowledge of autism and conducting children's assessments to ascertain their progress over time. The results of the research and assessments are used to contribute to the development of the AEIOU curriculum.**

AEIOU is involved in many projects with organisations including the Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC), Griffith University, and other Universities across Australia.

A current project we are enthusiastic to be part of is the development of Australia's first National Diagnostic Guidelines for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Presently, a diagnosis

of autism is gained by different means, depending on what state you reside in. This project aims to gather a broad range of perspectives from families, professionals, service providers and more, to inform the development of a consistent guideline for diagnosing autism at a national level. The launch of the Guidelines is due in September this year.

Another significant project AEIOU is involved in through the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), is conducting research on how Australian laws, regulations, and policies affect and respond to individuals with challenging behaviour, including those with Autism.

We are also excited to announce receipt of funding through the Department of Social Services (DSS) for the Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Services (ASSELCCs). AEIOU and Griffith University submitted a successful proposal to examine early predictors of language for minimally verbal children on the spectrum. This project will finish in November 2018.

## Dr Madonna Tucker achieves recognition

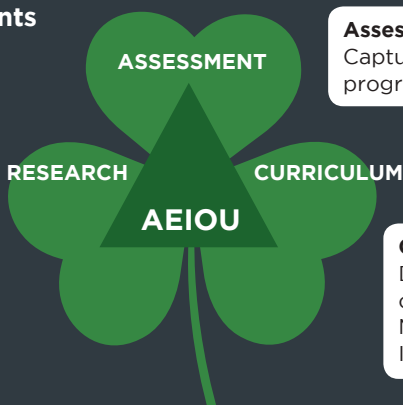
AEIOU is proud to announce Dr Madonna Tucker has been offered the position of Adjunct Senior Research Fellow in the Griffith Institute for Educational Research. This is a valuable link between Griffith University and the AEIOU Foundation as it strengthens the academic and research connection to allow easier collaboration between our organisations.

Dr Tucker attended The Australasian Society for Autism Research (ASFAR) Conference 2016 in Perth, where there were many informative presentations on topics such as genetics and ASD and early identification of ASD symptoms in very young children. She also attended the Autism CRC Participants' Day in accordance with the conference. This was extremely worthwhile, as input was provided from AEIOU's perspective into the future strategic directions for autism research in Australia.

## Research and Assessment Team

**The three elements of the Research and Assessment Team's Work**

**Research:** Seize the future, ask the appropriate research questions for the advancement of the ASD field



**Assessment:** Capture children's progress over time

**Curriculum:** Development of the AEIOU Model of Early Intervention

AEIOU's Research and Assessment Team is the conduit (stem) for integration of the three elements

As a team, the aim is to integrate *research* and *assessment* outcomes of our children, to inform the *curriculum* of AEIOU.



# CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

**The turning of the sod at our new South Australian centre in March was more than just a step in AEIOU Foundation's expansion plan. It was the result of years of commitment, passion and advocacy to meet our mission of providing more children access to quality evidence-based early intervention. This project is the result of building strong connections across the community, disability sector and government, and will double our capacity in South Australia. As a purpose-built facility it will meet the specific needs of our program and cater for children, families, staff and the community, in a central, accessible location.**

Reaching this milestone is exciting. However, projects such as this, and our new centre in Logan are only achieved by overcoming barriers for service access. AEIOU's Board, executive team and centre staff are working hard to represent and advocate for families as they navigate the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Recently, I personally tendered a submission to the Productivity Commission, as did AEIOU Foundation from an organisational perspective. This was to inform a review of costs to the NDIS, and our papers highlighted the real need to ensure the system is rigorous, meets the Government's own Guidelines for Good Practice (2012) and provides a cost benefit to the community. Through our commissioned cost benefit analysis as far back as 2013, we can demonstrate early intervention is an investment which has long-term financial cost savings, while providing life-long benefits.

I encourage parents and members of the community to advocate to ensure the success of the NDIS now and in the future. If you would like assistance, please don't hesitate to contact our recently appointed NDIS support officer, who is available to provide guidance and support to all our families.

As I write this column, I am about to embark on the toughest physical challenge I have ever undertaken: the 1,000 kilometre Chain Reaction Bike Challenge. This is an annual event, and AEIOU and Chain Reaction Foundation have enjoyed a long and successful partnership over recent years, raising funds to construct our Gold Coast centre and Logan centre consecutively. This year, we cycle from Sydney to Brisbane over seven days, and while the training schedule may be seen as torturous, our team is enthusiastic and we've been proud to participate in this worthy cause. I'll be recuperating by the time this newsletter goes to print, but I encourage you to support this cause at [chain-reaction.org.au/event/qld-ride-2017/rider/james-mortoniconcancercare-com-au](http://chain-reaction.org.au/event/qld-ride-2017/rider/james-mortoniconcancercare-com-au).

I hope you find this edition of Eyes on Autism of interest,



**James Morton**  
Chair  
AEIOU Foundation.



# AEIOU LOGAN ON TRACK TO OPEN IN 2018

Families in Logan and surrounding areas will have access to AEIOU's nationally recognised early intervention program when our newest centre opens in 2018.

The Logan centre has been made possible through a \$1 million National Stronger Regions Fund (NSRF) investment, the commitment of \$1 million by Minister for Health Cameron Dick, as well as support from Chain Reaction Foundation, Griffith University and The WANTZ Committee.

As part of the innovative Meadowbrook Health and Knowledge Precinct, the centre will provide access to early intervention for 40 children with autism and their families.

AEIOU Foundation CEO Alan Smith says the Logan centre will also see AEIOU collaborate with Griffith University to create training pathways for disciplines including behaviour therapy, speech and language pathology, occupational therapy and medicine.

"Through this connected model, AEIOU will provide knowledge and tools to educators in mainstream settings which will help provide children and families access to the community and assist them to transition to their next educational setting,"

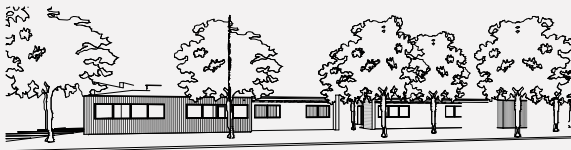
The Logan centre is expected to be completed in line with the roll out of the NDIS in Logan, which is 1 July 2018.



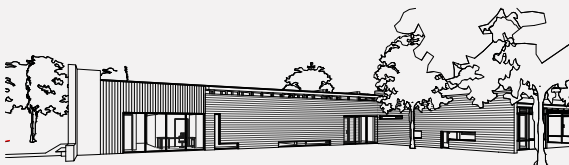
WEST VIEW



SOUTH WEST VIEW



SOUTH VIEW



NORTH WEST VIEW



## RAISING AWARENESS AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE

**Advocating on behalf of our children and families for autism early intervention is a core activity at AEIOU Foundation, and there is no better time to generate an understanding of what we do and why we do it, than during Autism Awareness Month.**

Recognised internationally, Autism Awareness Month is held every April and is an opportunity to celebrate our children and families, as well as our program.

Blending their artistic talents with a dose of enthusiasm, our children created gorgeous artworks to decorate their centres and showcase on social media. Their efforts caught the eye of the community and certainly spurred positive communication.

Likewise, our families demonstrated how AEIOU Foundation is making a difference to their child and their family's lives, through heartfelt posts on what AEIOU means to them. While the progress of each child drives our staff, these posts provide real passion.

AEIOU also reached out to the broader community through expos and events. In Adelaide, we exhibited at the Pregnancy, Babies and Children's expo and on the Gold Coast we attended the Kids Expo. Both these events saw tens of thousands walk through the door, with many taking the time to meet with staff on our stalls, and talk about our evidence-based early intervention program.

We also generated awareness through the annual Take A Hike Toowoomba event, where locals demonstrated their support walking and running the spectacular streets of their beautiful city. With a range of distances to enter, the event appealed to a broad sector of the community and raised the profile of our service in the region.

Rounding out our calendar of activities was the 2017 Queensland Chain Reaction Ultimate Corporate Bike Challenge, which inspires senior executives with a passion for cycling and an awareness of their corporate social responsibilities to ride more than 1000km from Sydney to Brisbane in just seven days. As beneficiaries of this event, alongside Ronald McDonald House, funds secured will go to construction of our new Logan Centre, due to open next year.

While Autism Awareness Month is a highlight on the AEIOU calendar, we work hard throughout the year to advocate for our children, families, and evidence-based early intervention.

# I'VE GOT THIS MUM, I'M A BIG BOY NOW .....

**There is no pride quite like watching your child happily march off to their first day at 'big school' with the words "I've got this Mum, I'm a big boy now". For retired NRL premiership winner Todd Lowrie and wife Sally, it was a day they had originally envisaged very differently, had it not been for AEIOU Foundation. Todd uprooted his career and family from New Zealand to enable Sonny to attend AEIOU's Nathan centre in 2014. After just 12 months in the program, Sonny successfully transitioned to a mainstream kindergarten and is now thriving at school.**

Being our first child, we did not know what was normal or what to look out for. Sally had some initial indications he was not developing typically in terms of his verbal communication. There were also other tell-tale signs, as we now know, such as not responding to his name or giving eye contact. We could see the frustration in his eyes and, after a lot of research, sought a diagnosis. Hearing the word 'autism' was the catalyst for so much uncertainty and change but it also led to some of the best times of our lives.

At the time of Sonny's diagnosis, we were living in New Zealand for my work. We exhausted every resource the country had to offer and then we started looking further afield, namely back home in Australia. We stumbled across AEIOU through some friends and realised the service they offered far outweighed anything we currently had access to. We felt strongly AEIOU was going to be the option to give Sonny the best start in life.

We cannot speak highly enough of AEIOU and the staff and facilities there. From the day we flew into Brisbane for our first interview right through to Sonny's graduation, the support we received was fantastic. I do admit it was difficult for us to adjust to our little boy attending a program full-time at just 2 1/2 years old, but lucky for us, he was happy to go along with it and thrived in his new environment.

The biggest achievements we saw during our time with AEIOU were definitely the development of communication, social and toileting skills. When Sonny started, he was barely talking. Also, small things people take for granted, such as saying hello to others when you walked into a room, we struggled with. However, with PECS, he started coming forward in leaps and bounds. We worked hard with our son at home, as well as supporting his learning at AEIOU.

After 12 months with the program, we made a decision in conjunction with the staff that Sonny had obtained enough skills to smoothly transition to mainstream kindy, and we have not looked back. That was at the end of 2014, and now, in 2017, we are successfully navigating 'big school' back in Newcastle, NSW. Like all parents, we had our hesitations but Sonny absolutely loves it. He walks into the classroom and talks to the other kids. We are so happy he can go to a mainstream school and just be a little boy. Above all, it has taught us to be confident in our children and echo that confidence to them because they feed off what we think and feel.

For those families just beginning their journey, we wish you all the very best, from the bottom of our hearts. Have faith in early intervention and continue the hard work at home. I know they already spend many hours in the program each week, but to make real progress, you need to be reinforcing those teachings on the weekends as well. Success is very much a team effort.

**By Todd Lowrie**

*A note from the editor: In order to attend AEIOU Foundation, Todd Lowrie left his position with the New Zealand Warriors to relocate to Brisbane. He was signed by the Brisbane Broncos, where he played for the duration of Sonny's early intervention. As well as working with Todd to maintain his successful career, the Brisbane Broncos are a valued supporter of AEIOU Foundation, helping us create a lifetime of opportunities for children with autism like Sonny.*



## BOROBI VISITS AEIOU

**Children at AEIOU Foundation's Gold Coast centre were thrilled to meet with Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games (GC2018) mascot Borobi late last year.**

The very special visitor was showered with affection and high-fives in his visit to the classrooms during their daily autism-specific early intervention program.

Leading up to the event, staff worked with children to familiarise them with Borobi, preparing them for the meet and greet opportunity.

While they were a little star struck, the event was a wonderful opportunity for them to put into practice the skills we are continually developing through our curriculum, particularly social skills, which prepare them for participation in the community.

We thank Borobi and the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games team for extending the friendship to the children attending AEIOU Gold Coast. It was a huge highlight for them and their families.



# EVOLVING OUR PROGRAM TO MAINTAIN BEST PRACTICE

**To ensure our program continues to achieve the best possible outcomes for children and families, we frequently review content for evidence-based integrity.**

The AEIOU Program is upheld by strategies which are consistent across all centres, and measured using data collected at regular intervals. The AEIOU curriculum is implemented throughout all our centres, providing staff with a tool to collect baseline data efficiently and design individualised programs for all our children. This is a milestone for AEIOU

Foundation which establishes us as leaders in autism early intervention in Australia.

To support our curriculum, maintain quality and provide continuous professional development across all criteria, we are currently working on providing staff with online training through the development of an AEIOU learning centre.

The learning centre is funded through an initiative of the Australian Government, to assist the Long Day Care sector to meet the qualification requirements under the National Quality Framework.

In further program developments, all AEIOU centres have appointed specialised program managers who are formally educated and have extensive experience in the field of behaviour analysis. Program managers oversee the implementation of each child's strategies and work with the transdisciplinary team to embed our curriculum and achieve positive outcomes.

AEIOU is also an NDIS-approved service and with these strategies now in place, AEIOU is firmly established as a leading provider in its field, with an emphasis on quality and fidelity.

## FAMILIES SUPPORTED THROUGHOUT THE AEIOU JOURNEY



**Recognising that families are an important key in each child's early intervention program, AEIOU has boosted its parent and carer training program with a selection of new workshops.**

The workshops, designed by our program coordinator team, include information, advice and tools which give parents a good understanding of the AEIOU program, and assist them to deliver strategies in the home and community environment.

The new suite of workshops is held at all centres and available at different times to ensure accessibility.

Topics include:

- Understanding the AEIOU Program
- Behaviour
- Communication

- Social skills
- Toilet training
- Mealtimes
- Independence
- Play
- Transition to school

We have also designed a short workshop to present at open days, offering advice for parents whose child is undergoing an autism diagnosis and considering enrolling in the AEIOU program.

To support our workshop program, AEIOU held a full-day parent conference at Griffith University Nathan campus earlier this year.

The conference included presentations from our program coordinator team on topics including: learning to learn; developing conversation skills; and tips and techniques for implementing strategies at home. Clinical psychologist Celia Bird

presented on Acceptance and Commitment Theory (ACT) while NDIS project Manager Sean Redmond gave advice for preparing to transition into the NDIS. A highlight of the event was the opening address by AEIOU Founder and Chairman James Morton who shared his personal story on establishing AEIOU Foundation, and inspired families to recognise the impact of evidence-based early intervention.

Recognising that early intervention is the key to long-term outcomes for children with autism, we are confident our workshops and events result in positive life-long outcomes. They are also a wonderful opportunity for parents and carers to connect with other families who are facing similar challenges.

To find out more about our workshops, go to [www.aeiou.org.au/workshops](http://www.aeiou.org.au/workshops).





# RECORD YEAR FOR TAKE A HIKE TOOWOOMBA

**More than 200 people donned their exercise gear to pound the pavement in this year's Take A Hike Toowoomba fundraiser on Sunday 23 April.**

The event attracted the highest number of participant's in its seven-year history, raising awareness and funds for AEIOU Foundation.

Toowoomba centre manager Gemma Moore couldn't be happier with the turnout and support for AEIOU. "We had more parents participate this year than any other year and some of our kids even walked five kilometres, which was beautiful", she says.

Joining in the fun were a team of "Angels", gathered by St Andrew's Toowoomba Hospital Oncology nurse Julianne McEwan.

Julianne was inspired to sign up by AEIOU Founder and Chairperson Dr James Morton, having worked for him in the region for 12 years.

"I remember when AEIOU was established and feel the community in Toowoomba has embraced it and the families it supports," she says.

"I've visited the centre here and met with families who have enrolled their children in the program.

"I've seen what a difference it has made to their lives and I also know from talking to Dr Morton how important early intervention is."

For participant Kirsten Bowman, the event held a special meaning as her son Lachy attends AEIOU Toowoomba.

Kirsten told the Toowoomba Chronicle: "When we started at AEIOU a year ago, Lachy was totally non-verbal, not toilet trained, had no social skills whatsoever and just wanted to be in his own little world."

"Since then he has just come on in leaps and bounds, so much further ahead. Just to hear his little voice is something amazing."

Take A Hike events are also held in Townsville and Brisbane. For more information, head to the AEIOU website at [www.aeiou.org.au/events](http://www.aeiou.org.au/events).



## TAKE A HIKE!

### Brisbane

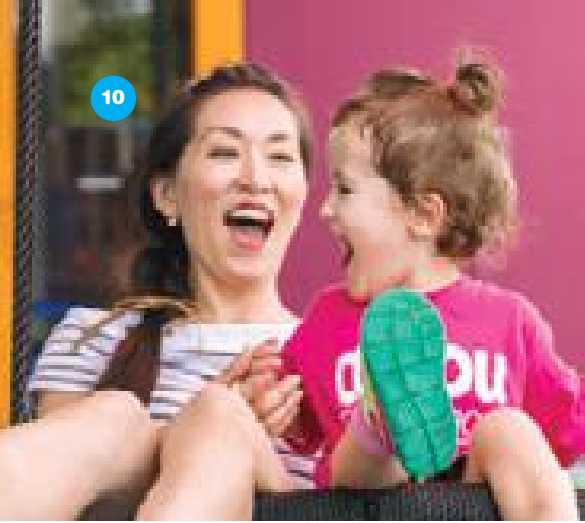
## Sunday 22 October 2017

### Walk. Run. Race.

**5km 10.5km 21km**

To change the life of a child with autism

[aeiou.org.au](http://aeiou.org.au)



## AROUND OUR CENTRES .....

We've had a cracking start to the year across all of our centres. Each child receives an individualised program at AEIOU, and the children and the staff work hard to achieve important goals. However, a sense of fun, play and the magic of childhood remains at the forefront of everything we do. This is a glimpse into some of the social highlights, and personal milestones we've enjoyed so far in 2017.

Each of our centres hosted Autism Awareness Month events, inviting children to participate in special activities, including craft, painting, cooking and more. At Bray Park, our children used their creative talent to demonstrate their individuality. Beginning with a blank piece of cardboard, they added shades of colours in traditional and abstract ways to represent each other's similarities and differences. Then, they had fun with fabric, stickers, string, leaves and shells to reflect the multiple layers within us all. A clever, and fun learning opportunity!

At Camira, the children all worked together to create one art installation, 'creating a lifetime of opportunities'. Each class completed one section of the artwork, working together with their peers and staff. It was terrific fun and the children, big and small, thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Another special day on the calendar was Harmony Day, where children across our centres participated in a variety of celebrations. In Bundaberg, the children created collages of Guatemalan worry dolls, solved aboriginal-designed puzzles and decorated boomerangs with dot paintings.

Easter brought bounds of fun, with the children joining in Easter bonnet parades and egg-hunts. For those who enjoy a sweet treat, chocolate eggs delighted, but a variety of treats, including tiny toys were also incorporated into the hunt. Bright decorations and the joy of discovery were found in abundance.

## NDIS UPDATE

**Transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme is gaining momentum for our families and organisation. With Adelaide, Townsville, Toowoomba and Camira centres operating under this new funding model, we are gaining valuable knowledge and creating strong networks within the NDIS system.**

### New NDIS Support Coordinator

Keeping abreast of requirements demands significant resourcing across AEIOU. To ensure we remain focused, we have employed our former Parent Liaison and Fees Coordinator Katrina Ives in the new role of NDIS Support Coordinator. Katrina's experience working with AEIOU families gives her a good understanding of the significant and specialised needs of our families, while also having knowledge of our program and the value it delivers for children with autism, parents and carers, and the broader community.

Katrina is available to assist families to prepare for their initial meeting with the NDIS, as well as support staff with knowledge and updates.

"What I have learnt from our families is that they feel overwhelmed when embarking on the NDIS process. It is a particularly daunting time," Katrina says.

"Families are realising they need a thorough understanding of their child's current and future needs, to help them set goals, receive the therapy required to achieve those goals, and to access adequate funding."

"Receiving therapy and education in the early years leads to lifelong outcomes, which improve the quality of life, and the opportunities, for not just the child, but their entire family and the community they live in."

"Helping them access that therapy and care is rewarding. It helps them, and I have a whole lot of job satisfaction."

### NDIS Workshops

AEIOU is thrilled with the response to our NDIS workshop series being rolled out across areas transitioning to the new scheme.

Conducted over two sessions, the workshops include information on:

- Navigating the NDIS
- Planning for successful outcomes
- Making sense of your funding package
- Reviewing your plan

The workshops are conducted at centres six months before each transition date, to provide knowledge and security to our families, and the general community.

Feedback indicates the sessions not only provide a valuable overview, but give confidence to families as they embark on the process.

Our next NDIS workshops will be held in Bundaberg, to prepare for rollout in October. Next year, they will be presented in Logan, Brisbane, Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast for a mid 2018 roll out.

To find out more, check out our NDIS page at [www.aeiou.org.au/ndis](http://www.aeiou.org.au/ndis).



Many of our centres also welcome external activities and visits for the children. In March, the children at Bray Park welcomed a visit from Ocean Life, who provided an educational and informative hands on experience to our children. The children were able to learn about sea creatures, touch the animals and adjust to a change in their routine, follow instructions and practice expanding their vocabulary. In advance of the occasion, the children also created their own artwork to welcome their visitors, using a variety of materials, including pasta, ribbons, paint and more.

We've also been able to share some great child milestones from our centres, including Luke, who began with AEIOU's Camira centre in 2016. He was non-verbal, and not able to echo any verbalisations. Today, he can repeat three words in a row and make eye contact. Everybody is super proud of his achievements.

Korbin, from our Gold Coast centre was only able to understand simple language and had limited speech when he started at AEIOU. Now, he can understand complex language and speaks in full sentences. He can even add people's names into his conversation.

At Nathan, Kai has been making enormous gains in his learning. He has starting to complete a variety of activities independently, including applying his own sunscreen, following single step instructions and more.

In Huntfield Heights, Jasper was able to demonstrate his functional play skills as he engaged in pretend play with toy people and dolls' house furniture. He was seen cleverly narrating the scene, while he seated people at the table for dinner, and afterwards gave one a bath while the others waited patiently. Jasper's game was also a great display of his ability to grasp the use of functional language.

This is just a glimpse into some of the activities, and cause for celebration across our centres recently. If you aren't already following us on Facebook, join us to keep up with stories like this and more.

## SUPPORT NETWORK KEY TO ACHIEVING GOALS .....

**Our journey with AEIOU may have just begun, but already we have achieved so many goals. The staff have helped us to realise we are not alone. We have support and are surrounded by people who understand what our family is going through. Because of all this, we are so confident about what the future holds for our son Bruce and based on his progress, can see him attending school next year.**

Bruce's development was on par with his peers until he reached his first birthday. We noticed his speech was a little delayed but believed he would progress in his own time. He also had a fair few quirks, would rarely make eye contact, was particular about routines and would scream and thrash if I used a different pathway, or drove a different route in the car. He would bite himself when he experienced any overwhelming emotion. It was hard to watch.

We are a Defence family and moved from Brisbane to Melbourne just before Bruce turned two years old. In the following year, we noticed he had actually lost speech and words like Mum, Dad and bye were no longer being said. Instead, he would simply grunt and point. When we took Bruce to a GP, they asked within minutes if we had considered autism. Going through the process for a diagnosis, we experienced so many emotions. We were sad, shocked, relieved and even excited. Now living in Adelaide at the time, we had no family or friends around, and Bruce's behaviours made it impossible to socialise in order to gain support. We put in motion a plan to move home to Queensland in mid-2016, where I attended an AEIOU Open Day to see how it all worked. I was immediately impressed and delighted at the level of passion and enthusiasm the staff show for what they do. I was so determined to get Bruce in.

Bruce started at the Gold Coast centre late last year, just shy of his fourth birthday. In his first week, I saw dramatic positive changes.

He independently sang "If you're happy and you know it" while I drove him to AEIOU, something he had never done before. I cried when I dropped him off that morning, and a lovely staff member gave me a hug and said this was only the beginning. She could not have been more right.

Already this year Bruce has successfully toilet trained, and is dressing himself. He is starting to sit for longer periods; however, I admit dinnertime is still a game of musical chairs. He sings songs, engages in and initiates play with other children, and enjoys participating in art activities. He asks me every day what the weather is and tells me if it's sunny or cloudy. He is soaking in so much learning and has even started to write. Only a year ago, he wouldn't even scribble with a pencil.

Since coming to AEIOU, our family unit has become more fluid. While Bruce still needs to be in set routines for certain things, it is easier to distract him enough to avoid a meltdown. We also pass on the strategies we learn to our older children to help them to also communicate and connect with Bruce. That's not to say it is all smooth sailing and we do still struggle at times, but we are all so much better equipped to deal with it. We look forward to watching Bruce grow with such excitement and promise.

Our time with AEIOU has taught us that together, we've all got this! It's so important to trust in the staff and trust in yourself as a parent. Have faith that with the right support, your child can achieve goals, even if it's something as simple as eating a piece of fruit, or saying hello to a new friend.

*By Elizabeth Asher*



# CHAIN REACTION

**AEIOU Founder James Morton and his Brisbane team of riders conquered a mental and physical challenge as they cycled from Sydney to Brisbane for the 2017 Chain Reaction Queensland Challenge in late April.**

The 'Team AEIOU' riders formed part of a 46-strong peloton raising vital funds and awareness for children's charities, including major beneficiaries AEIOU Foundation and Ronald McDonald House South East Queensland.

Dr Morton was supported by Managing Director of SV Partners Terry van der Velde, Sports Physiotherapist David Chiang and Managing Partner of UHY Haines Norton Darren Laarhoven.

He said seven days of pain for the team was worth the extraordinary effect it would have on young lives.

"Supporting Chain Reaction means having a direct hand in creating a lifetime of opportunities for young children with autism."

"Each dollar raised helps AEIOU get closer to our vision of ensuring every child in Australia is given the chance to reach their full potential in life. The opening of our 10th centre in Logan in 2018 brings 50 children closer to that goal."

The 2017 challenge officially launched with a corporate lunch at Cloudland in March, with \$46,900 raised on the day towards the fundraising total. The 180 guests were also treated to the inspirational musings of Australia's first Winter Olympic Gold medallist, Steven Bradbury, OAM.

Chain Reaction Foundation has raised more than \$20 million since being established in 2007 and conducts annual rides across Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

For more information, visit [www.chain-reaction.org.au](http://www.chain-reaction.org.au).



# AEIOU BIENNIAL GALA BALL CAPTURES HEARTS AND MINDS

We were thrilled to host our biennial Gala Ball in May, welcoming more than 200 friends of AEIOU Foundation to the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre. Hosted by Ian Skippen, who has supported AEIOU Foundation since 2010, guests were entertained by the fabulous 'Three Waiters', and helped raise more than \$135,000 to support young children with autism.

AEIOU mum Elaine Dionysius shared her family's story on the night; her son William attends our Camira centre. He's made tremendous gains in his development, and is now able to speak in sentences with up to 300 words in his vocabulary.

AEIOU extends sincere thanks to our Gala Ball sponsors, all attendees, particularly those who generously donated and bid on auction prizes, and those who volunteered to help make the night a success.



# OUR LEARNING JOURNEY

**We are blessed with three wonderful sons, two who have autism. Our middle child Henry has attended AEIOU Bray Park since 2015 and is due to transition to 'big school' in 2018. There he will join his older brother William, who only received a diagnosis late last year. While Henry presented with more typical autism symptoms, William's traits were more subtle. Our experiences with our sons have taught us the importance of surrounding yourself with a qualified team to give you the confidence and tools to effectively connect with your children.**

Henry was around 18 months old when the speech regression began. He loved to spin around in circles flapping his arms, laughing to himself in his own little world. He rarely answered to his name and seemed to have no fear. Life bustled on around him but he took little notice. His little interaction with the world generally came in frustrated bouts where he'd bang his head on the floor. We knew something was not quite right but we didn't expect autism and had little knowledge of what it meant.

After Henry's diagnosis we started weekly speech and occupational therapy. Our two amazing therapists referred us to AEIOU Foundation. As a stay-at-home mum, I felt reluctant to put him in a full-time program. However, when we toured the centre we were greeted by staff who were not at all phased by Henry running rampant through their classes. We were amazed when we were told the children sitting still in a semi-circle all started out like Henry.

From the outside looking in, you could tell right away the staff were passionate about helping the children and were right on their level. They showed so much respect and were very tender with them. We thought to ourselves that there might be some hope here.

The beauty of the program for us was that it is a one-stop shop in so many respects. We had done our research and knew 20 hours of therapy each week was recommended, and AEIOU were the only ones in Queensland who could provide that service, supported by a transdisciplinary team.

It has also been so important to us to be involved in the learning process as parents, attending training sessions and speaking with staff each day to seek out answers. For our family, living with autism means a whole new approach to parenting, but AEIOU has equipped us with invaluable tools and the supporting education to confidently help Henry.

Seeing the progress Henry has made at AEIOU is so heartening. He is calmer, he is learning not to self-harm, has far more confidence and is starting to vocalise more words and sounds. He is able to sit for longer with activities, can dress and toilet himself and is increasingly aware of his surroundings, including people.

It has helped considerably that he can now communicate in a way we understand, which has reduced his frustration because he can now interact with the world rather than just pulling away from it. The benefits are lifelong for him.

It may only be one of our sons attending AEIOU, but the knowledge and tools we have gained overall has helped us with our eldest son as well. We are very thankful for all they have done to best prepare us for life ahead. It has been tough but so worth it in the end.

To our fellow parents, I encourage you to be open to receiving new information. Getting advice from the experts is not an attack on your parenting style, but rather presenting a more effective way to connect with your children. Be brave, be honest and be humble enough to ask questions of your therapy team. Most of, develop a thick skin; there are many people out there that just do not know any better. If you can, educate them and if you do not have time, just ignore them. Spend your energy on your child where it is going to make a real difference.

And on a more personal note, it is so important to actively seek out other families in the same boat because these relationships form such an integral part of your support network. Who better to surround yourself with than those who know exactly what you are going through. These people have your family's best interests at heart.

*By Cindy Walters*



# JURASSIC JAM 3

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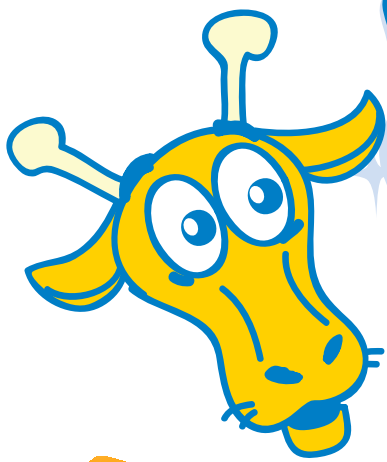
# OUR SUPPORTERS .....



## VOLUNTEERS MAKE THE WORLD GO ROUND

In May, we celebrated National Volunteers Week. We have a wonderful support base at AEIOU, with volunteers who roll up their sleeves at our events, community initiatives and centre activities. We would like to extend our gratitude to those of you who choose to be part of our community, giving your time and effort to make our events a success.





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