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MEDIA RELEASE

Guides help improve non-verbal children's communication skills

Children with autism will be better supported by treating clinicians in their communication development, thanks to a series of new clinical guides launched today by AEIOU Foundation, in partnership with the Menzies Health Institute (Griffith University).

With the help of Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centres (ASELCC) across Australia, **Dr Madonna Tucker** (AEIOU Foundation) and **Associate Professor David Trembath** (Griffith University) produced the series of guides to give practical support to therapists and paediatricians working with children with minimal verbal language.

“Communication is at the heart of the most important parts of life. It enables kids to learn, to connect, and to be safe,” Mr Trembath said.

“It’s all about having the voice to be yourself, whether the child communicates through speech or non-verbal methods.

“Our starting point with the study was to bring together specialists from around Australia with real-world experience of helping children learn to communicate.

“We also carefully monitored the progress of more than 70 children they worked with, to understand the different pathways children take to communicate.

“This all comes together in the guides: combining the best research evidence with the best insights from clinical practice to support children across the spectrum.”

Dr Tucker said ultimately, they hoped the guides would support speech pathologists, allied health professionals, and educators working with pre-school aged children with autism to better understand and address the challenges of working within a clinical setting.

The guides will be tonight launched at AEIOU Foundation’s Brisbane headquarters, with award-winning journalist and columnist **Kylie Lang** facilitating a panel of industry experts, which also includes Associate Professor Beth Siggers, Chair of the AEIOU Research and Innovation Committee, and current AEIOU parent Clare O’Brien.

Mrs O’Brien’s son Paddy has been receiving autism-specific early intervention to help him to communicate his wants and needs.

“Paddy had a very limited vocabulary of maybe 50 words and sounds when he started early intervention,” she said.

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Mrs O'Brien said one of their primary goals was for Paddy to be able to gain an adult's attention and initiate social interactions.

"He's now using two-word utterances on nearly 60% of occasions, which is a huge improvement," she said.

"Without research like this, coupled with teams of trained and aware clinicians, we would not be able to get the help for Paddy that he needs."

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ABOUT AEIOU Foundation: AEIOU Foundation is a leading provider of early intervention for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). We provide evidence-based therapy and education which is family-focused and provides every child with the best opportunity to gain vital independence and achieve their full potential. Operating from 10 locations, AEIOU enrolls children aged 2 to 6 years. For more information about AEIOU Foundation visit www.aeiou.org.au.

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