

Early autism aid is critical

Schools need help with transitions

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EXPERTS want the State Government to offer designated autism units in some schools to help children transition into mainstream education.

Autism Spectrum Disorder costs Australia \$9.7 billion a year, or \$87,000 for each person living with the condition.

AEIOU founder Doctor James Morton said early intervention programs were vital to give children with ASD the greatest opportunity for success.

He said training provided to special needs educators in schools did not include specific components on autism.

"The teachers in schools get little training on how to

work with a child with autism in the classroom," Dr Morton said.

"Children need to be transitioned into a school space that is able to work with them and continue to build on what they have learned in an early intervention setting."

Dr Morton called for one in 10 Queensland schools to provide an autism unit with specialised programs and behavioural and occupational therapists on hand.

"These units could support children at school and build the capacity of existing teachers to work with them," he said.

June and Frank De Pasquale's son Joey, now 14,

started early intervention when he was three.

Mrs De Pasquale said Joey "lived in his own little world", was non-communicative and could not make eye contact. But after diagnosis and early intervention, Joey started mainstream school and has since flourished, even receiving an academic award in high school.

"If Joey didn't receive early intervention he would have never gone to a mainstream school," she said.

"The way he is today is because of early intervention programs like AEIOU."

She said she would like to see more support for teachers to understand the needs of children with autism.

PRESS CLIPPING

Publication: *The Courier Mail*
Page: 20
Date: Wednesday 1 April 2015

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June, Joey and Frank De Pasquale