

eyeson autism



Add some cheer to your
Christmas stocking

It's beginning to feel a lot like Christmas...

This year, everyone at AEIOU has truly gotten into the Christmas spirit! For the first time, we're giving Australian families the opportunity to support young children with autism on behalf of a loved one this Christmas, in lieu of presents.

We recently launched our new Christmas card campaign, which features children from across our program having fun and engaging in education and therapy activities. These are activities that don't come naturally to children in our centres, and they have worked hard to communicate, to enjoy the taste and feel of different foods and more.

There are three Christmas cards, and you can choose from a \$25, \$50 or \$100 tax deductible donation to receive a correlating card, and either gift it to someone you care about, or perhaps even yourself. The idea is that as a donor, you are providing your loved one a gift of early intervention for a child with autism by supporting services such as speech and occupational therapy or music therapy, which are all delivered as an embedded part of our education program.

Autism affects every person differently, but parents can often relate to the analogy of living inside a bubble, being separated from

the world by an invisible barrier. AEIOU aims to break that bubble by helping children communicate and connect with their loved ones, engage in their community and cope with their environments. You can help, too. When you donate to AEIOU, you are paving the way for a more comfortable and connected life, ensuring a child has the best chance of reaching his or her full potential and achieving greater independence.

Cards are available to be purchased online at aeiou.org.au. You can also choose to make a general donation this Christmas. Please email giving@aeiou.org.au for more information.

A special thank you to our supporters

It's been an enormous year at AEIOU, and the entire team is grateful for the ongoing support we receive on behalf of the children in our program from so many generous individuals, organisations and community groups.

Our service has grown to support more than 200 families every year, which is made possible with your assistance. Whether it's donating your time or funds, everything counts and for that reason, we hosted a special Thank You function in October for everyone who lent a helping hand to AEIOU this year. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting new faces for the first time, and seeing old friends of AEIOU.



AEIOU enjoyed hosting a social evening to thank our supporters



In April, join AEIOU for a bright, blue month!

We're joining the global campaign to 'Light it up Blue' for the entire month in April, to raise awareness for people with autism. We'll also be raising funds for early intervention and for the children in our program. We'll be selling blue wristbands online, in our centres, at local schools and beyond. If you're interested in hosting a box of wristbands for sale at your school or office, please contact giving@aeiou.org.au or phone 07 3320 7514.



what's on

Lynn's Lunch 8 March 2013

Save the date for an exquisite event hosted by the Lynn Wright Memorial Fund, to raise funds to provide financial support to families who may not otherwise be able to attend the AEIOU program.

International Autism Awareness Day 2 April 2013

Go blue today and help raise awareness for children with autism. You can support AEIOU by purchasing a blue wristband, or hosting a blue-day party in your home or office. For more information visit our website, aeiou.org.au.

AEIOU Bubble Day – a family carnival 21 April 2013

Incorporating Paddle for Kids, this is a day out for the whole family! You can make a splash as part of our paddle relay, or delight in the live entertainment, carnival rides and delicious festival foods. We hope to see you there! Go to aeiou.org.au for more information.

Take a Hike Toowoomba 28 April 2013

The Take a Hike series is back in 2013, and the first cab off the rank is Toowoomba. To sign up as a hiker, or support the event in another way, contact Michael Brazier, Major Gifts and Sponsorship Manager on 07 3320 7916.

New faces and going places

Over two days in November, our centres hosted open days, inviting families, autism advisors, allied health professionals and medical practitioners to gain new insight into our program and how it could benefit their child, or a child under their care.

More than 100 visitors were able to meet our staff and see the children engaging in the program, finding out more about what we do at AEIOU. With enrolments now open for 2013, the open days provided an excellent opportunity to talk to teachers, learning facilitators and therapists and ask questions in person.

AEIOU recently launched a new video for parents and referring practitioners. To see it, visit our website, www.aeiou.org.au and go to our enrolments page.

A word from our CEO

Alan Smith – CEO

For the first time this Christmas, AEIOU has launched a special campaign that invites you to make a donation which will purchase education and therapy support tools for the children in our program on behalf of your loved ones, as a gift.

There are so many 'things' we would like to have come Christmas Day, but it is humbling to remember that for many families, the best gift of all would be hearing their child's voice, or being able to communicate with them. It might even be a desire to go on a rare family outing which is smooth sailing, whether that's to a party, or to see a movie.

We had lots of fun in a special photo shoot to create cards for this campaign, and will bring you all of the news and information about how it works and how you can donate to AEIOU over the holiday season in this newsletter.

This edition also marks the end of a busy year so we'll also share everything the children and staff in our centres have been up to, along with some family stories. Many of the children at AEIOU are getting ready to transition to their next learning environment and I take this opportunity to wish them, and their families well in the coming weeks, months and years ahead.

In other news, we recently completed the Take a Hike Series for 2012, and I was thrilled to see many hikers return for their second and third years in the challenge, along with some fresh faces. I was also proud to see staff

from AEIOU lacing up their shoes to join in the series, with several team members making their mark in hikes across each of the cities the event took place in.

Construction is well underway at our new centre in Bundaberg and we look forward to opening its doors in the New Year.

We've welcomed amazing support from our local community this year, and in this newsletter bring you a wrap on the most recent events. We are also delighted to be a major beneficiary of the 2013 Chain Reaction ride. In May, there will be over 42 corporate identities taking on a seven day, 1,000 kilometre challenge, with the goal of raising funds for a number of charities which support young children with medical and special needs, including AEIOU. We're grateful for the chance to be part of this initiative, and will bring more news in the New Year.

It's been one of our biggest years yet at AEIOU, and we're looking forward to another bright year with all of you in 2013.

Every success in our program is a joint achievement, and is a result of our committed team, the children, their families and you, who give so unreservedly to make a difference to the futures of young children.

Enjoy a happy, safe and healthy Christmas period.

Alan Smith
CEO



AEIOU is now taking enrolments for 2013, and we hosted a series of open days for new families in November

Thank You, Blue Crew!

On Father's Day, hundreds of Brisbane locals put their best foot forward for children with autism on Sunday September 2, 2012 by joining the AEIOU Blue Crew at the annual Bridge to Brisbane fun run.

Together, the crew raised over \$25,000 in a mammoth effort!

In total, there were 130 members of the Blue Crew this year, and the big news was that our team won the event's Hero Time competition. That means another \$2,000 was donated to our fundraising tally with thanks to Suncorp Bank.

AEIOU CEO Alan Smith was part of the team, and said he was impressed with the number of participants on the day. "Our Blue Crew has taken Bridge to Brisbane by storm every year since 2009. It's one of the biggest support crews to get behind a charity at the event, and across four events, we have welcomed nearly 600 generous people to walk or run for the kids in our program."

A popular destination at the end of every Bridge to Brisbane challenge is the AEIOU breakfast tent, where we serve up a hearty spread to sustain all of the participants each year. We hope to see you all again next September!

Blue skies blessed our Blue Crew, who raised over \$25,000 at this year's Bridge to Brisbane



Playing with new friends

Every AEIOU centre hosts community days to help children understand their environments and social behaviours. At our Nathan centre, children who are getting ready to transition to their next learning environment have been making weekly visits to neighbouring Boronia Kindergarten where they practice social play and peer engagement in a new environment. The initiative, which began in 2011, provides an excellent opportunity for AEIOU children to engage in play, follow verbal instructions and adjust to changes in routine which might be similar to an education environment.

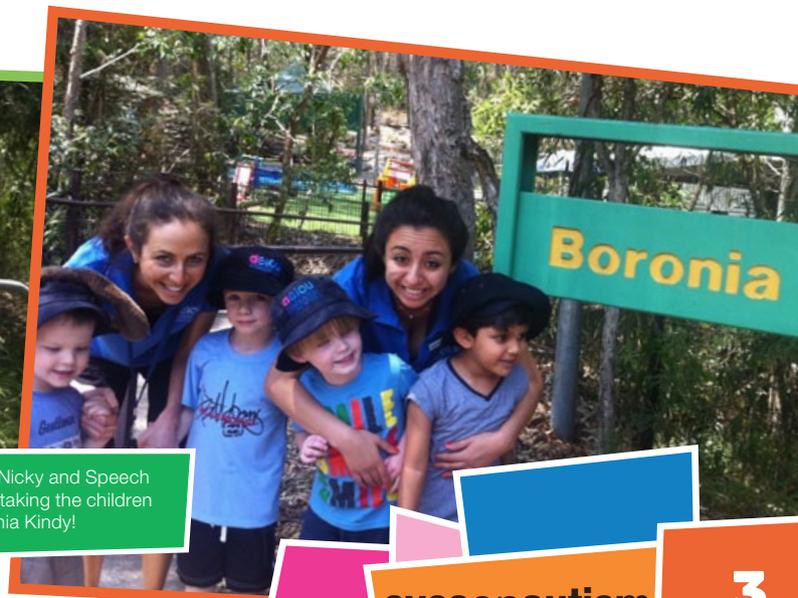
Our team also use the visits to identify areas of strengths and where children might need more support, such as developing receptive language, to build into their individual plans back at AEIOU.

The children at Boronia also enjoy the visits. They love learning about the different communication tools our children use, and have developed a great sense of social awareness and acceptance.

They all love playing Duck, Duck, Goose and Ring a Ring a Rosie, along with many others, and often stay to enjoy morning tea with the kindergarten children. Our team prepares children for the change in routine by reading social stories. The team at AEIOU Nathan have been thrilled to see their students independently playing with their friends, particularly in imaginative play, which can be difficult for a child with autism.



Occupational Therapist Nicky and Speech Pathologist Sarah enjoy taking the children for weekly visits at Boronia Kindy!





AEIOU will be a major beneficiary of the 2013 Chain Reaction ride



Chain Reaction... pedal power for children with autism

AEIOU is excited to announce we've been selected as a major beneficiary of the 2013 Chain Reaction Challenge Queensland charity bike ride. Funds raised from this event will go towards the capital construction of a new AEIOU Gold Coast Centre.

Chain Reaction is the ultimate Corporate Bike Challenge, raising funds for children's charities by challenging senior executives who have a passion for cycling and an awareness of their corporate social responsibilities, to ride a 1,000 plus kilometre course in seven days. Chain Reaction conducts cycling events for the Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane and Gold Coast business communities and since its first ride in 2007 has raised more than \$7.3 million on behalf of its charity partners.

The launch of the 2013 Queensland event took place on Tuesday 20 November at Il Centro Restaurant in Brisbane. This lunch was attended by over 120 business executives from the Brisbane and Gold Coast business communities and was hosted by Channel 10's Georgina Lewis and featured well known SBS cycling commentator Mike Tomalaris as the guest speaker.

The 2013 Chain Reaction Challenge Queensland will be held between 11 and 17 May 2013 and will start on the Gold Coast and travel around the picturesque northern New South Wales and South East Queensland countryside before arriving in Brisbane. Riders will be treated to some fantastic scenery as they pass through Byron Bay, Casino, Warwick, Toowoomba, and Kilcoy.

For more information visit www.chain-reaction.org.au or follow the news on the AEIOU website or Facebook page.



A superhero photo shoot, where children showed their strengths

Children shine at AEIOU!

At AEIOU, we're always thinking of how we can thank all of the people who support the children in our program, and show them exactly how their time, funds and assistance makes a difference. Many of the children love to dress up as their favourite superhero or fairy tale character, and given how incredible they are, it's quite fitting because we think they're little superheroes too!

This inspired us to capture them on camera, and thus, several AEIOU children became the stars of a new suite of thank you cards,

showing us all the ways that you have helped them to shine by supporting the program we provide to them.

On the same day, we took the photos for our new Christmas campaign, where children were able to engage in a number of education and therapy supported activities, including 'cooking' (with food stations forming part of occupational therapy program at many centres), playing musical instruments, and speech therapy.

Several families from across our South East Queensland centres volunteered to have their child take part in our new Thank You and Christmas campaigns, and the results are amazing.

Thank you to all of the children and mums and dads, along with the team on the day who helped to make this suite of cards a reality.



Take a Hike - four cities, one challenge

This year, nearly 200 business identities, social personalities and community members set out on foot to make a difference for young children who are affected by autism. Together, they raised in excess of \$270,000, with all funds raised remaining local, ensuring each region could fundraise for the children attending the centre located in their city or town. In Toowoomba, over 40 hikers laced up; there were 25 hikers lining the shores at the Gold Coast, 50 in Townsville and the number grew to 70 in Brisbane for a mammoth river-side challenge in October, closing the chapter on AEIOU's biggest year of Take a Hike events yet.

While many hikers were return supporters, there were plenty of new faces in the teams. Most recently in Brisbane, this included Broncos CEO Paul White and Anthony Jones, the Principal of Templetons. Anthony thoroughly enjoyed the walk, along with the opportunity to meet so many fantastic people.

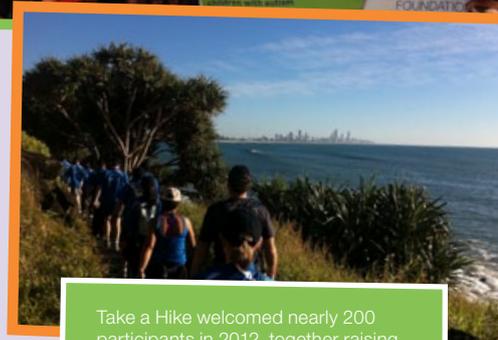
"When I got home and reflected on the day, I couldn't help but think that while the aches and pains of the walk would subside in a few days, it pales into insignificance when compared to the challenges faced by parents caring for a child with autism or other similar disabilities. It is great that an organisation like yours is there to help and we have been proud to do our bit to assist," Anthony said.

AEIOU's CEO Alan Smith said he was blown away by the support that shone through at every Take a Hike event. "I took part in the Toowoomba and Brisbane hikes this year, and several members of our team, including our Board Directors, Fundraising managers, therapists, teachers and learning facilitators joined the hikes to support those people who were getting behind AEIOU and to highlight their commitment to the children and families in our program," Alan said.

"Along with those participating in the walk, the support crews were fundamental to the success of every single hike. Many parents and staff managed the rest stops and barbeques, with one parent in Townsville, Leonie McAuliffe, ensuring everyone could 'eat fresh' by donating lunch for all 50 hikers from their Subway Franchise."

"I can't wait to kick off another round of Take a Hike initiatives in 2013. It's such an uplifting event, despite the physical and mental challenge it incorporates and we thoroughly enjoy hosting it. It will only get bigger and better!"

If you, or someone you know would like to join Take a Hike in Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Toowoomba or Townsville in 2013, please contact our Events and Relationships Manager Jemma Riding, or our Major Gifts and Sponsorship Manager Michael Brazier on 3320 7914.



Take a Hike welcomed nearly 200 participants in 2012, together raising over \$250,000 for AEIOU.



Sandy Peachey (left) with celebrated five years with AEIOU

Five years and counting!

This year, three members of our team celebrated five years of service with AEIOU Foundation. Sandy Peachey, a teacher at our Toowoomba centre, Beverley Swift, a learning facilitator at our Bray Park Centre, and Diane Heaney AEIOU's Director of Education, all celebrated their fifth anniversaries in recent times. Our service is unique and what sets AEIOU apart are our people. Diane, Sandy and Bev have all made an incredible difference to the lives of young children in our program, as well as their families, and we thank them for their ongoing commitment and dedication.

A trifecta for St Laurie's College students

In August, 1,500 St Laurence College students, donned in specially branded yellow AEIOU uniforms took on the challenge of hiking over 15 km along the Brisbane River to help raise \$15,250 for AEIOU. They began the day with a rousing assembly, where The Hon. Kevin Rudd MP joined them to officially begin the event and reflect on the importance of supporting our communities here and abroad, in line with the students' motivation for the day which was 'Many Hearts, May Ways, One Spirit'.

At AEIOU, we rely on community awareness and support, and everyone at the Foundation was impressed by the commitment and generosity of St Laurence's College

students, having now walked for AEIOU for three consecutive years.

AEIOU has also enjoyed the vibrant, dedicated hands on support at events including Paddle for Kids, with the St Laurie's cooking squad joining our families, friends and supporters to raise funds for children in our program. This is a great show of commitment from the students, who have dedicated their own time on weekends to support AEIOU, rain, hail or shine. Thank you St Laurie's!

Our children and our centres - the places you go!

Every term, our centres host a number of incursions and excursions to complement the education and therapy components of the program, helping children engage with their community and cope with new experiences. We also celebrate special occasions and practice doing everyday tasks which can be difficult for a child with autism.

Our **Hervey Bay** children enjoyed a visit from the local fire brigade, a community experience to teach them about emergency services and to expand on their interests. Every child had a chance to operate the water hose, which they loved! The centre also welcomed a visit from a local school dental nurse, who showed the children how to brush their teeth. They had lots of fun practicing on the very large teeth of a toy dinosaur.

In **Bundaberg**, it's been all about experiencing new environments, with children and staff joined by families for a day focussed on social interaction and exploration opportunities in a supported environment at the Bargara's Christsen Park. The children fed fish vegemite sandwiches, and were quickly surrounded by a school of fish, much to their delight.

There was a birthday bonanza in **Townsville** recently, as part of an initiative to support children to learn vital skills for attending birthday parties in the future.

There was a jumping castle, face painting, a reptile show and birthday cake, complete with singing. Like many AEIOU centres, a visiting hairdresser is a regular and welcome guest in Townsville, where children practice having their hair cut, washed and brushed. For many children, this is a real challenge to overcome, and the team are always pleased to see smiling faces during the process, especially from children who had never been able to visit a hairdresser without becoming overwhelmed or experiencing a meltdown.

The Police and Fire Brigade visited our **Nathan** centre for their community experience, exposing the children to community helpers. They were able to have free run of the police car and the fire engine, sitting inside the fire truck and police car, and even wearing a fire jacket and police hat! One of the fire officers noticed a child using an iPad, and discovered he had an app about firemen and community helpers, which sparked his interest to know more about the apps we use at AEIOU.

Nathan has also welcomed several hairdressing visits, and the children love Judy their hairdressing friend. To coincide with her latest visit, several wonderful 'firsts' were celebrated: The first time a child's hair was cut, the first haircut without tears, and the first haircut in front of friends! The giraffe class had a group hair cutting experience where they sat together and watched each other's hair being cut.

Lyndon Davis made a special visit to our **Sippy Downs** centre to host an interactive performance with Basic Gubbi Gubbi History and language with Aboriginal song dance and didgeridoo. He also presented an Aboriginal art display complete with storytelling. While there, he showed the children how to make an inside boomerang (called a room rang), led the children in some great animal dancing, and taught everyone a song they already know and love, Heads, Shoulders Knees and Toes in Gubbi Gubbi language which was lots of fun.

Later in the term, the centre attended a community visit to Woolworths at Chancellor Park Shopping Centre. This is the first of many visits for the Shark Room children. It's designed to help them with their sensory requirements, and will also engage staff in the centre to show them what we do at AEIOU and how they too can support children with ASD on the Sunshine Coast.

Meanwhile, **Bray Park** has been preparing for their end of year party, with Santa Claus booked for a special visit, giving all of the children a book which their parents have bought and wrapped. Our CEO Alan Smith stars as Santa every year, and not only do the children love it, Alan has a great time, too!



AEIOU CEO Alan Smith joins the Bray Park parents and children for a special Christmas party each year



AEIOU hosted a community day, where the police came to teach children about community helpers



Biel and the children at Sippy Downs thoroughly enjoyed their visit from Lyndon Davis, where they learned animal dances and how to make an inside boomerang!



A Book Review: Inside Asperger's Looking Out by Kathy Hoopmann

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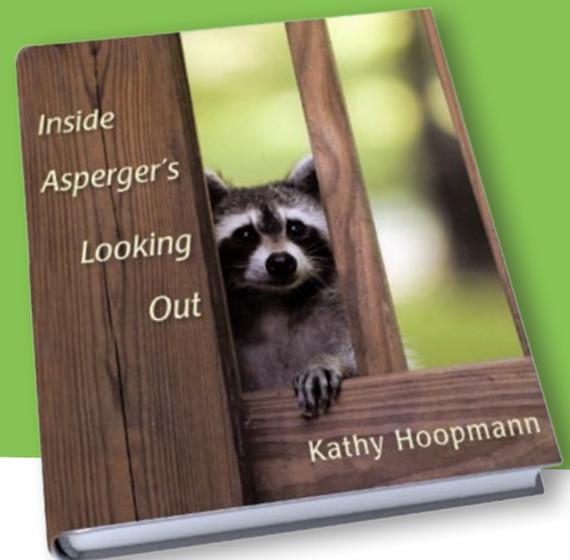
Inside Asperger's looking Out

AUTHOR:

Kathy Hoopmann



AEIOU Education
Director reviewed Kathy
Hoopmann's latest book



THE BOOK:

We asked our Director of Education, Diane Heaney to review the latest book by Kathy Hoopmann. Diane understands children with autism better than most.

As an early childhood teacher with over 20 years experience in the United Kingdom and Australia, she has spent the last decade working exclusively with children on the Autism Spectrum. She is also the mother of a teenage daughter with the condition.

"This book offers a real insight in to the world of Asperger Syndrome. Although it is humorous with delightful pictures, the book artfully illustrates the difficulties that many people face on a daily basis. Hoopmann covers many of the traits that are experienced by people living with

Asperger's Syndrome, including sensory issues, social skills, body language and trying to understand what people are thinking and meaning. I liked how the book celebrates what is special about people with Asperger's Syndrome and their unique characteristics. Most of the pictures feature animals, in quirky scenarios which help to portray the book's messages in an engaging way and makes you want to turn the page to see what is coming next.

This book would appeal to all ages and be an excellent resource for schools to use when explaining the similarities and differences between classmates."

—Diane Heaney

Our friends at Footprint Books are giving you the chance to win one of three copies of Kathy Hoopmann's new book, Inside Asperger's Looking Out. All you need to do is email communications@aeiou.org.au with your details to go into the draw, by Monday 17 December.

A celebration of the best things in life at Lynn's Lunch

Lynn's Lunch was an inspirational affair this year, when Alex Perry, Charlotte Dawson and Sofie Formica joined us, along with AEIOU Dad Paul Betros to share rare and personal insights into some of the greatest triumphs and adversities in their lives.

The luncheon was hosted by Emily Jade O'Keeffe, and raised enough funds to help provide financial assistance to up to 10 families at AEIOU. The afternoon featured a great mix of style, grace and relaxed entertainment, where guests had the chance win beautiful prizes, including a coveted piece by Anthony's Fine Jewellery.

Before the lunch, Alex, Charlotte and Emily Jade visited our Nathan centre, where they met our team and the children, and even took part in a music therapy session.

Lynn's Lunch is in memory of Lynn Wright, who showed incredible support to her daughter Louise Morton and her husband James as they established AEIOU. To make a donation to the Lynn Wright Memorial Fund or to find out how it supports families at AEIOU, go to www.aeiou.org.au/lynn-wright.

Staff in profile

Amber Simpson joined AEIOU in August, taking on the role of Head of People and Performance. With more than 20 years of experience as a human resources professional, Amber has been awarded for her excellence in human resource management and customer service, receiving both the National and State Award for Excellence in People Management from the Australian Human Resources Institute in 2001 and 2007 respectively. Amber was also awarded the State Award for Customer Service Excellence from the Australian Customer Services Association in 2000.

Amber worked for The Creche & Kindergarten Association (C&K) for nearly 10 years and is delighted to join AEIOU, with a preference to work for an organisation where the focus is on supporting children to grow and develop through the engagement of our staff.



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Alex, Charlotte and Emily Jade made a special visit to an AEIOU centre

Camilla and Paul Betros were special guests at Lynn's Lunch



Bring the family to our carnival at Captain Burke Park on 21 April!



AEIOU Bubble Day ... A family carnival

Paddle for Kids will make a splash in April, but with a twist... this time, it's becoming part of AEIOU's inaugural 'Bubble Day' – a family carnival for all ages.

If your children love ice cream, fairy floss, jumping castles, carnival rides and live entertainment, this is an event not to be missed – there will be something there for everyone, so mums, dads, aunts and uncles will be able to enjoy great coffee, delicious food and more.

Paddle for Kids will take place on the Brisbane River near Captain Burke Park throughout the day, with guests free to cheer on the paddlers, while also enjoying live music and children's entertainment.

We'll share all the news about the carnival on our website and via Facebook in the coming weeks, and hope to see you there!

ASCA Supports AEIOU Foundation

ASCA is a major supporter of AEIOU, and donated \$10,000 to help the Foundation close the funding gap for one child in the program this year.

ASCA is a member association of schools which supports a number of charities across Australia every year, and was encouraged to sponsor AEIOU by past parent, Frank De Pasquale of Quality Food Services. Franks son Joey De Pasquale was one of the first children to be enrolled at AEIOU in 2005 at our Moorooka centre.

ASCA is Australia's leading purchasing advisor and buying group for schools. It is a not-for-profit member association which is focussed on improving the financial outcomes for schools, acting as a purchasing facilitator for members. ASCA negotiates favourable prices for products

and services from companies that supply to schools and delivers maximum returns to members as a result.

The Association was established in Victoria in 1979, where the organisation supported 16 schools. Today, it supports nearly 2,500 member schools across Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. Because of its buying power, ASCA can offer members unique opportunities to negotiate across a wide range of school products and services.

While assisting schools in this capacity, ASCA is also committed to assisting charities that support the education and welfare of school-aged children and donates its surplus funds to a number of registered charities. David Edwards, CEO of ASCA, says his organisation

particularly looks for charities and projects where the ASCA funding can help make a real difference in the education of young people, and he is therefore delighted to be assisting AEIOU.

AEIOU is grateful for the support from organisations like ASCA. It is vital to ensure we can continue to provide high quality education and therapy for young children with autism, helping them to learn new skills and connect with their loved ones and the environment around them.

ASCA CEO
David Edwards



THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS





Dr. Jessica Paynter, Professor Rita Jordan and CEO Alan Smith hosted the inaugural AEIOU Research Conference

Autism Forum showcased cutting-edge research

In September, Professor Rita Jordan OBE joined several of Queensland's leading autism professionals to deliver a workshop and keynote presentation at AEIOU's inaugural Research Conference.

More than 100 medical practitioners, allied health professionals, researchers and students with an interest in autism attended the conference, which took place over two days at the South Bank Institute of Technology to explore cutting edge research and new developments in the field of autism.

Professor Jordan, an Emeritus Professor in Autism Studies at the University of Birmingham has researched many aspects of ASD and overseen the development of a range of professional development programs in autism.

AEIOU was delighted to welcome her, along with Dr James Scott, Dr James Harraway, Associate Professor Helen Heussler and Professor Jacqueline Roberts to present new research findings and discussed topics including the genetics of autism, sleep difficulties and co-morbidities, the DSM-V and managing challenging behaviours in children with autism.

AEIOU Research and Psychology Manager Dr Jessica Paynter said the conference was a tremendous success and she looks forward to hosting it again in 2013. "Rita's workshop on challenging behaviour provided much insight into the nature of autism and challenging behaviours and was informed by a lifetime of work in the field, and each of our guest speakers delivered informative presentations across a number of topics, including sleep problems in ASD, environmental risk factors for ASD, and how to navigate the maze of intervention options and how to evaluate 'evidence'," Dr Paynter said.

Professor Jordan's update on the DSM-V was also an informative highlight for guests, as was the roundtable discussion which addressed a wide range of questions from audience members including how educators and therapists can support parents to make informed decisions about treatment for their children, the (lack of) evidence-base for vitamin-treatments for autism, a discussion of diagnosis of girls and more.



Autism Awareness Month - Go blue for AEIOU!

This year, AEIOU turned Brisbane blue for autism, and we're striving to make a bigger and brighter mark across Queensland next year, increasing our footprint to raise funds and awareness for autism in April. The festivities will officially commence on Tuesday April 2 (International Autism Awareness Day) at a special launch event inviting friends, family members, AEIOU supporters and community members touched by autism to mark the occasion.

We'll be asking guests at the launch to join in a special 'break the bubble of autism' awareness initiative, with everyone joining together to blow as many bubbles as possible at the same time, with the sky being the limit!

You will also be able to buy blue wristbands to support AEIOU's campaign and if the mood strikes your fancy, you might like to join the festivities in your own way, perhaps by changing the light bulb on your front veranda, hanging blue lanterns at home, or by hosting a party, or bake-off with your friends or colleagues, where everyone makes a donation for morning or afternoon tea, to name a few ideas.

We will be hosting a competition on our Facebook Page, and the winner of the most creative 'Blue Party' will win a special prize. The competition will launch on Monday April 1 and will close on Tuesday April 30, 2013.

The wristbands will be for sale in our centres, local schools and online, but if you work your work place would like a box of wristbands for staff, or for visitors, please contact our Fundraising team by emailing giving@aeiou.org.au or phone 07 3320 7914.

Light it up Blue began in the United States, with Autism Speaks creating the world's brightest campaign for autism awareness, turning iconic monuments all over the globe blue on April 2.

A family story



Emily and Matt Gates moved to Brisbane with their family to attend AEIOU

Emily and Matt Gates story

By Chris Gates

"We often joke with our friends that we are 'Living the Dream'. Making light of our situation is my coping mechanism but the reality is that the way autism affects our lives is difficult. We have two children Emily, who is six, and Matthew, who is four, and they have both been diagnosed with autism.

Since birth, Em and Matt were difficult babies. Our life was filled with sleep and feeding difficulties, chronic infections and countless doctor and hospital visits. As the kids grew older, they stopped meeting their milestones and keeping up with their peers. The diagnosis was reasonably quick and straight forward, with Emily at three and Matt (who is more severely affected) at two years of age. While I wanted answers for their behaviours, autism wasn't the answer I was prepared for. For me, the hardest part was accepting they were not going to just grow out of it and life was not going to get easier for them (not in the short term anyway). It's hard not knowing what their future holds, and wondering if Matt will ever speak.

What followed in the next few years was an emotional rollercoaster of reading, researching, therapy, doctors, routines, schedules and learning a new kind of normal. We felt isolated from the community and family events because of the challenging behaviours and anxiety that followed. There were many days spent stuck at home because it was just easier.

Em and Matt are complete opposites with totally different needs. We were fortunate to have incredibly experienced and caring therapists and doctors who quickly put a program in place for us. Living in Tasmania, there were no full-time early intervention services and I quickly found myself being their therapist first and mother second. I was trying to make the most of every opportunity to get enough intervention per week and would beat myself up when I didn't. As a mother, you want to do everything you can for your children.

There was one day I decided to ring a friend, and an old neighbour who had moved to Queensland. We had been pregnant at the same time with our girls, and I told her about autism and my "new life". The next day she rang me in tears and told me that from everything I had said, she thought her daughter might also have autism. And, so her rollercoaster ride began. A few months later she got in touch to tell me she had enrolled her daughter into AEIOU Foundation. She said it had changed their lives, and if for no other reason, I should do it for my own sanity.

I began researching and in August 2011, we were offered a place for Em and Matt at AEIOU so we relocated to Queensland. Moving Interstate and leaving behind family and our therapy team was a huge decision, but it's one we haven't regretted for a second.

We quickly saw the benefits and improvements from full-time intensive intervention. For pre-school aged kids with ASD the understanding, caring and supportive nature of AEIOU is a fantastic environment. Our time at AEIOU will end soon, but the skills our children gained and the friendships we have made will last a lifetime.

Emily loves to read and sing, and one of her favourite books is *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle. She is learning to communicate, and speaks spontaneously. She also enjoys singing and dancing.

Matt has learned to follow instructions and is more willing to try new things. He gives us more eye contact and has become much more independent.

While the last six years haven't been easy, and despite any challenges ahead, we have two beautiful children who are not 'autistic': Emily and Matt are affected by autism and we are going to do everything in our power to make their lives easier and help them reach their full potential."

A family story

Isabelle's story

By Liza Raggatt

"Isabelle joined AEIOU in January 2011. Over that time she has been learning the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) which has really helped her to develop her ability to communicate.

Now, she can tell us when she wants different things. For example, if she wants to watch her favourite show, she will bring us the TV remote control to turn the TV on, or if she would like some toast, she'll bring us a piece of bread. This year has been very exciting as Izzie has been toilet-trained. Self-care and communication skills are such essential abilities and most parents take it

for granted that their children will acquire them. When they don't, it can be really hard to know where, and how to teach these skills. Most recently, I've been delighted to see Izzie playing without any assistance with her friends from AEIOU, and using her imagination. AEIOU's supportive, consistent environment is helping Izzie to learn and connect with us and her friends, which is invaluable."



Isabelle has learned to communicate her wants and needs at AEIOU

Building bricks in Bundaberg

Construction is well and truly underway on our new building in Bundaberg. The member for Burnett, Stephen Bennett turned the first sod in June along with AEIOU's Education Director Diane Heaney, CQUniversity's Bundaberg Head of Campus Philip Clift and parents and friends of AEIOU in the community.

The development is a result of the Queensland Government's commitment of \$700,000 capital funding to deliver the service to 12 families on a full-time basis. AEIOU is thrilled to provide our full service to more local families, with several families continuing to receive support in our temporary program at a local ABC Early Learning Centre.

The centre's location will create opportunities for research collaboration between AEIOU and CQUniversity, along with work experience placements for students studying education.

To coincide with the imminent completion of the build, AEIOU hosted a community workshop in December at the Bundaberg RSL, inviting families and referring practitioners to learn more about how the program works.

Cynthia Farrelly, whose son Oliver joined the AEIOU program this year, was a strong advocate for local families in Bundaberg, supporting AEIOU to deliver its service in the

region. She shared her story at the forum. Cynthia has three children with autism, and she explains they are all very different:

"I have been advocating for service in Bundaberg since my eldest was diagnosed in 2008. We're lucky to have access to a number of private therapy services in Bundaberg which are full of dedicated wonderful, understanding people, but they have long waiting lists and could only offer fortnightly sessions.

I knew my third child, Oliver had ASD when he was one. I privately paid for Speech, Occupational therapy and attended the local ECDU play group. But I knew he needed more, and I knew many other families in the area needed greater support.

Oliver has just turned three, and the changes in him are amazing. He interacts with his peers, he notices things like the sunset, and tells me that he misses me. He tells me about FUN, and about Denyce and Justine at the centre. He has gone from a child who would just wander out into the backyard and spray plants with water bottles for hours and bang his head on walls, to playing with rocket ships and building cities out of blocks in the playroom. He asks questions, and is interested in trying new things.



Cynthia's son Oliver (left) with his brother and sister is shining at AEIOU Bundaberg

I love that he asks me for cuddles, and doesn't mind me kissing him – and oh boy, can he talk!

We still see our therapists privately. He has known them for two years now, and simply can't believe how much he has progressed. We had a recent appointment with Professor Tony Attwood who said Oliver has shown quite remarkable progress and is clearly benefiting from the early intervention program and that he hopes that Oliver is able to stay at AEIOU as long as he can.

I can't express how much AEIOU has changed my family's life. It is affordable and everything you need is under one roof. The team feel like our family. I finally have found a place that understands my child and his needs, and the best thing is, I get to be a MUM first, rather than a therapist. I want my children to shine, and to be functioning and accepted into their communities. I hope that with AEIOU we can raise awareness and understanding about autism in Bundaberg and that other families like mine can benefit from it."

This year, you can give a gift with meaning

When you think of Christmas and all of its magical moments, what do you see? For many, it is the image of children and enchanting moments of surprise and delight. Imagine if your gift could give a child and their whole family the ability to communicate and connect this Christmas.

AEIOU provides an education program with therapy support to help children communicate, learn, develop fine and gross motor skills, overcome sensory issues, and more. This year, you can buy a therapy and education inspired 'gift' by making a donation to AEIOU, supporting the program and the families we work with.

There are three donation cards, at \$25, \$50 and \$100. You can make a purchase by simply selecting the card(s) and quantity in the form below, or buy online at aeiou.org.au. All donations are tax deductible and you will receive a receipt along with the gift card of your choice to give to a loved one this year in lieu of a present.

Thank you for helping the young children at AEIOU to reach their full potential!



DONATE NOW

to make a difference for children with autism



\$25 for food therapy gift card Qnty: _____ \$50 for music therapy gift card Qnty: _____ \$100 for speech therapy gift card Qnty: _____

Title	First Name	Surname	Position
Organisation		Address	
Suburb	State	Postcode	
Phone	Email		

Visa MasterCard Cheque enclosed (made payable to AEIOU Foundation)

Card No. _____ Expiry _____

Name on Card _____ Cardholders signature _____

Please send me information on:

- Leaving a gift in my will
- Holding a fundraising event for AEIOU Foundation
- I would like to visit a centre

OR

- I have already left a bequest to AEIOU Foundation in my will
- I do not wish to receive any further correspondence from AEIOU Foundation
- Please update my details