



# eyes on autism

Issue 22 Summer 2018

**deiou**  
FOUNDATION  
for children with autism

Capturing the  
*extraordinary*

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# MESSAGE FROM THE CEO .....

It has long been our vision to ensure every child has the opportunity to access high-quality, affordable intervention. Every milestone we reach brings us a step closer to realising that dream, and we're seeing it across the organisation, be that opening a centre in an area which was crying out for better support; through new research opportunities to increase understanding; by building awareness within our community, or developing strong partnerships with those who share our vision.

With that, it gives me great pride to announce our partners at The Autism Cooperative Research Centre have published Australia's first National Guideline for the assessment and diagnosis of autism. This Guideline, born from an enormous body of work and research, will be indispensable in the race to get children professionally diagnosed with consistency, aiding timely access to supports. We also anticipate it will reduce the challenges and uncertainty families can experience when seeking a formal diagnosis for their child.

Opening AEIOU's new centre in Logan was a golden piece in the puzzle for us this year, bringing great satisfaction in

knowing we can reach an entirely new community. It has also allowed us to build strong collaborations with like-minded organisations, including Logan Together, who we are working with on a number of projects in the year ahead. We've also strengthened our partnership with Griffith University, who will be using our Logan centre as a base for the Autism Centre of Excellence. We look forward to having such a forward-thinking and expert team in close proximity.

The mid-year rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in our south-east Queensland centres has been a priority for us, and we continue to work closely with the appointed Access Partner, Benevolent Society, to ensure positive outcomes are achieved for all of our children. As such, our internal NDIS team has expanded to include a second Transition Support Officer, who is already making great headway and providing exceptional support to our families. I take this opportunity to urge each family, whether already enrolled at AEIOU, or with a new autism diagnosis, to contact our team for support while accessing the NDIS and developing your child's plan.

Finally, as we look ahead, I wish all the best to our transitioning families. We're lucky enough to stay in touch with past-families, who share the wonderful achievements and progress made since their time with us. It may be a visit, email or phone call, but each encouraging story is like a spark which further energises the teams across the organisation. It drives us to keep charging forward because every minute of the day we spend working with a child has the potential to completely alter their life's course. And there's no greater motivation than that.



**Alan Smith**  
CEO



# CHAIRPERSON'S UPDATE .....

It has been a privilege to lead AEIOU Foundation through the second half of 2018. During this time I've had an opportunity to officiate the opening of a new centre in Logan, and visit a number of other centres to meet children, their families and our staff members, which has been a real highlight.

I've been humbled by the transformations our children and families are experiencing; but above all, their stories are always filled with *hope*. And that *hope* was born inside the walls of our centres and nurtured by our staff, who see every child's potential and who accept every challenge as an opportunity for growth. They are the heroes of AEIOU's story and deserve to receive recognition for their life-changing work.

As we reflect on the year, I would also like to thank my esteemed colleagues - AEIOU's Board of Directors, which includes our newest members, Mark Algie, Dayle Grant and Ben Deverson; the Central Office team; our centre-based staff, and each of our valuable supporters. You all play a vital role in helping AEIOU to achieve its vision and work tirelessly with one eye on the present and one on the future.

May the new year bring with it countless new opportunities for all of our children and, as we grow, give AEIOU the opportunity to work with many new families.

**Susan Rix AM**  
Chair





**"Our daughter is now encouraging others to play"**



## THE PAINÉ FAMILY .....

**Sienna has a smile which lights up a room. Her vibrancy is contagious and the kindness she shows others is enough to make any parent proud. Looking through the camera lens at this confident girl, it's hard to imagine that at the start of this year, the picture was very different. Walking into AEIOU for the first time, staff were greeted by a shy child with golden curls who feared being separated from her parents, struggled to communicate and lacked the self-assurance to play with others. The metamorphosis dad David and mum Steph have witnessed since then is nothing short of remarkable.**

"There were several signs about Sienna's behaviour that led us to suspect something was amiss. She had delayed speech and had difficulty making friends at childcare. Her diagnosis was one of those things we'll probably never forget. We obviously had the assessment done because we suspected everything wasn't ok, but it did take time to finally accept the answers we received and then learn how to live with this new normal."

We tried to help Sienna as much as we could via several different therapies. But we were so time poor with work commitments and running around everywhere for appointments that it was overwhelming. Fortunately we came across AEIOU, who we discovered offered occupational, speech and behavioural therapy under the one roof.

When we first visited the Nathan centre, it was immediately apparent that the centre was set up with the specific needs of children with autism in mind. Everything was clean, there were little distractions for the kids and the ratio of adults to children was much better than any childcare or kindergarten could provide. Sienna started at the centre in January 2018 when she was four years old.

Naturally, it was a very anxious time for Sienna being in such an unfamiliar environment, but she overcame this very quickly and even managed to engage with others for the first time. She initially found it challenging to go to the toilet because the needed to ask to get access, but she soon learned how to speak up and ask to go. She has definitely improved her sentence construction since working with the therapy team, who have been so patient with her.

Seeing Sienna confidently riding a bike without trainers for the first time (one year earlier than her older sister) made us realise that we probably underestimate how quickly children

learn things and adapt. We set goals for Sienna at AEIOU, and the structure has brought more routine to our lives. The stresses of planning extra-curricular activities and therapies have melted away.

Sienna now has some very good friends who she constantly talks about and looks forward to meeting each day. We've also been told by the team she's taking a lead role in the playground and encouraging and guiding other children to play; something she was on the other side of only months ago. She has also become confident in larger groups and has learnt to be an active and engaged participant in the classroom environment. We love to visualise Sienna venturing off to primary school with her backpack on and having a close group of friends who she plays with.

We know many parents are probably still coming to terms with their ASD diagnosis when they are first met with the intensive nature of AEIOU. But it's important to remember that while we as parents have reservations about sending our children off to 'school' from such a young age, the kids see it very differently. For them, it's a place to go and have fun. AEIOU sets a foundation for them to develop and make friends in a safe environment without being judged. This social interaction is one of the most important skills to help them have a smooth transition into big school."

*By David & Steph Paine*

# CENTRE OPENING HERALDS NEW ERA FOR Logan



We're open and operational in Logan! There are 25 new families already accessing support, which is a number we expect to double in the coming year. The official opening took place in September, with special guests, valued partners and government dignitaries sharing in the milestone.

The ceremony was officiated by Member for Forde, Mr Bert Van Manen MP and Minister for Employment and Small Business, Minister for Training and Skills Development and Member for Waterford Shannon Fentiman, and Griffith University Pro Vice Chancellor and Head of Logan Campus Linda O'Brien, along with AEIOU Foundation Chair Susan Rix AM and CEO Alan Smith.

AEIOU's 10th centre was made possible with Federal and State

Government Funding, including a \$1 million National Stronger Regions Fund grant, and a \$1 million grant from Queensland Health. Griffith University generously donated the land via a long-term lease and the facilities are located in the Meadowbrook Health and Knowledge Precinct.

"Until now, Logan families have either been unable to access this individual therapy program, or had no choice but to commute to AEIOU centres on the Gold Coast, or in Brisbane," Mr Smith said.

"It's only been a few months, but we're already receiving such heartening feedback from the classrooms, with incredible progress being made each and every day.

"It's no easy feat to build a full staffing team across multiple disciplines from

scratch, but they've certainly unified under the guidance of Nayna Mistry and Anna Brodie, to ensure as smooth a transition as possible for all families."

Mr Smith also thanked Buchan Architects and Hutchinson Builders for the respective design and construction of the building, as well as Chain Reaction Challenge and the WANTZ Committee for their generous contributions.

The AEIOU Logan Centre for Autism features four purpose-designed classrooms, a motor-skill therapy room, playground and modern staff, research and parent facilities. It will also be a hub for parent and community workshops, and a base for the Griffith University Autism Centre of Excellence, among other things.

## BOARD EXPANSION SEES TRIPLE

AEIOU is privileged to operate under the guidance of a highly knowledgeable and experienced Board of Directors, and it is our great honour to announce the recent appointment of three new Board Members. Mark Algie, Dayle Grant and Ben Deverson come from diverse backgrounds and hold positions in the top of their respective fields and will help guide the organisation in the coming years. We are extremely grateful for their philanthropic desires and know the organisation will continue to be very well supported and directed under their leadership.

### Mr Mark Algie



Mark is a highly experienced human resources executive with more than 15 years' experience across numerous sectors including defence,

heavy engineering, construction, utilities, infrastructure and media. He is currently the Managing Director of Human Outsource Pty Ltd which specialises in the provision of human resources and industrial relations advice. He is also the Director, Events and Custom Media for News Corp Australia. He began his career as an Army Officer with the Department of Defence.

### Ms Dayle Grant



Dayle Grant is an experienced Senior C-Suite Executive working across broad and diverse industries and specialises in customer strategy, community engagement, executive leadership effectiveness, organisational culture and business transformation. Dayle has undertaken varied roles from Chief Customer Officer and Chief People Officer for organisations of 3000 people, and Head of Shared Services responsible for procurement, property, fleet and logistics. She is passionate about building strong corporate cultures, and developing and advancing women in their careers, undertaking volunteer mentoring and coaching.

### Mr Ben Deverson



Ben is an experienced senior executive with 21 years' experience across numerous industry sectors including professional

services, infrastructure, defence, resources and the public sector. He is currently the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Hynes Legal, a boutique law firm based in Brisbane. Ben is a graduate of the Royal Military College of Australia and served as an Australian Army Officer before commencing a career in senior management roles in some of the world's largest professional services firms. Ben's executive experience has seen him navigate organisations through major change management programs and he is excited to support AEIOU's future strategy and operations in the NDIS environment.

### Acknowledgements

**Cover photography:** Andrew Denford Photography

**Graphic Design:** Chapter Agency

**Contributing photographers:** Rebecca Ruhle, Leigh Horwood Photography,

Unveil Wedding Films & Photography

**Printing:** Worldwide South Brisbane

**Editor:** Alyce Valentine-Berrett

**Issue number:** 22

# Katie Byrom

**Occupation:** Physiotherapy student, UQ

**Chain Reaction Rides:** 1 ride (2018 Women's 300)

**Chain Reaction Support Crew:** 4 rides

As the daughter of Chain Reaction Challenge's Queensland Chair Michael Byrom, Katie Byrom is no stranger to cycling, but before committing to this year's Women's 300 ride, did not even own a bike of her own. But she was not going to let one small detail prevent her from being part of such a successful philanthropic movement.

"During last year's Sydney to Brisbane seven-day ride I was the massage therapist for AEIOU Foundation's team, which is where I learnt about the valuable role they play in those crucial early years," she said.

"It's so comforting to know that if you were a parent with a child with autism, you wouldn't be left in the dark. AEIOU are that light, giving children and their families support when it is needed most."

And, beyond the fundraising aspect, Ms Byrom said the rides were such a powerful and rewarding life experience, connecting some of the community's most inspiring men and women.

"When you go away on a Chain Reaction ride, you're accepted into this tight knit community. I have witnessed this positivity, comradery and generosity and have been overawed by their commitment to children in need," she said.

"To see so many riders return year after year was motivation enough to get on the bike."

Ms Byrom was also very grateful to be welcomed into the Women's 300 'crew' with open arms.

"It's so nice to be surrounded by such supportive women. Everyone is committed to the cause and continually motivate and support each other on and off the bike," she said.



## CHAIN REACTION CYCLISTS PUSH THROUGH FOG TO HIT \$25 million jackpot

For most of us, the idea of cycling more than 300 kilometres in heavy rain, thick fog and along steep, mountainous roads seems an impossible feat. But, a tight-knit peloton of 45 women did just that, pushing off on an epic three-day ride on the Sunshine Coast with the goal to raise money for children with autism.

AEIOU is no stranger to Chain Reaction: an extraordinary initiative which has long-supported the children in our centres. This particular event was special, with the cyclists raising more than \$400,000 ahead of the Women's 300 ride, tipping the total tally of funds-raised to \$25 million since it established in 2007.

There to greet cyclists at the end of the first, cold, hard day on their bikes was Milla Wilson: Who inspired the foundation which has now helped thousands of sick children, or those with special needs throughout Australia.

Milla, now 12, was just two days old when she was rushed to hospital with a brain haemorrhage. After spending weeks at her side in the Newborn Intensive Care Unit at the Monash Medical Centre, her parents vowed to help young children who were sick, or in need of support. Since that time, they have inspired cyclists riding for Chain Reaction across Australia.

Milla says she is proud of what has been achieved by the cyclists in the Women's 300. "It's pretty amazing to see what these women have raised, and to witness them on the ride.

"I think I might ride in Chain Reaction with my friends someday," she goes on to venture, to which Dad Berrick adds "I know you'll ride this event some day!"

This year's Women's 300 included team members such as former Australian Road Race and Time Trial champion and 2018 Commonwealth Games Time Trial Gold Medallist Katrin

Garfoot and Director of Bentley's Chartered Accountants Queensland, Patrice Sherrie.

Mrs Sherrie, who rides in the seven-day event each year in Queensland, also chairs the event organising committee with the vision of providing a unique and empowering networking opportunity for the female cyclists in Brisbane's business community.

"I wanted to be sure that the influential female executives I knew had an avenue not only to share their love of cycling and support for charitable organisations, but to encourage other women to network in an environment that was fun rather than intimidating," she said.

Cyclist Katie Byrom agrees, explaining Chain Reaction is a powerful and rewarding life experience, connecting some of the community's most inspiring men and women.

Katie, whose father Michael Byrom chairs the committee for the seven-day ride in Queensland, has long been part of the initiative in the support crew.

The proceeds raised from this year's Women's 300 will directly support children at AEIOU Foundation's Sippy Downs centre.

AEIOU extends enormous gratitude to each of this year's cyclists, and the team across Chain Reaction for their ongoing support and inspiring dedication to a generation of young children.





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



Do you know, that your gift will last a lifetime?

## GRANT GIVES PARENTS A *voice*



We are delighted and proud to be the recipients of a grant for \$26,000 from the Collier Charitable Fund. This project will explore and document parents' understanding of early intervention services for young children with autism in Queensland and South Australia. Parental perspectives will be sought and combined with a literature review to create user-friendly information. Digital, print and translated forms of educational material will be produced to fill the gap regarding accessible early intervention services information for parents of children with autism.

## WANTZ DINNER A GLAM AFFAIR

We were honoured to again be a beneficiary for the annual WANTZ Gala Dinner at Customs House. The sell-out black-tie event was attended by more than 200 people and raised more than \$160,000 for the children in our service.



## RECOGNISING OUR UNSUNG HEROES

The AEIOU Reward and Recognition Program is being launched in early 2019 and is an important part of our approach to acknowledging our people and celebrating achievements and outstanding performance. It is designed to be used by staff across all centres to support recognition, as well as promote our organisation values – *Support, Teamwork, Excellence and Passion*, and also further strengthen our culture. The successful nominees will be announced quarterly, followed by the naming of an Employee of the Year.

## HIKERS CONQUER GNARLY Challenge

Nearly 90 Brisbane locals tackled a gruelling 42km trek from Mt Glorious to The Gap as part of the second annual Champions Challenge event, which raised nearly \$100,000 for AEIOU. The Challenge is the brainchild of a group of mates, who not only sought an opportunity to challenge themselves, but a chance to make a real, life-changing difference to children with autism and their families. Participants included corporate partners and supporters from leading consultancy firms Lambert & Rehbein and SMEC and leading construction contractors including BMD and Qld Bridge & Civil, to name a few.



# SUPPORT SMOOTH SCHOOL transition

Over the past year, more than a dozen of our Gold Coast families participated in a pilot transition project, partnering with the Autism Hub, to better support children as they left the comfort of AEIOU to move on to school. It's been a rewarding opportunity to build stronger relationships with local state schools, while gaining new insight into their processes and constraints, as well as looking at how we can best support teachers. We've had the pleasure of chatting with former AEIOU mum Elizabeth Asher, whose son Bruce (our former Annual Report cover star) transitioned to a mainstream classroom with special education support at Park Lake State School in early 2018.

"During the school holidays, we did a bit of a practice run and adopted the routines he would be following once he started school, including eating his meals at the same time as his soon-to-be lunch breaks. Then, on the first day, he just got up and got dressed in his new uniform! There were no tears, he just clapped and said 'bye mum'. I sat at home all day just waiting for a phone call to say something was wrong, but that call never came."

Having gone through AEIOU, we wouldn't have done it any other way – Bruce wouldn't be anywhere near where he is without them. We credit them so much for preparing him for his new routine. With the structure they provided, it was like he'd already done a full year of school before he even began. He was exposed to so much in our time with AEIOU that nothing was a surprise for him. I do admit I actually cried a lot when I realised just how well he was slotting in there.

I was also so grateful for the sessions AEIOU held the end of the previous year, which gave me all the information and tips I needed to feel confident approaching this new setting. It was also comforting to know I could have picked up the phone and spoken to the AEIOU team anytime I had a question. And, the school we go to has been so inclusive. I can't fault them.

I think, for any child with autism, parents can't expect it's going to be smooth sailing, but the school was eager to work closely with us to make the tweaks needed to ensure Bruce was in the right environment for him. He's in a class where the support teacher will come and sit with him, rather than separating him from his peers. They try to make everything as normal as possible for children who do have special needs.

Bruce is such a bright, beautiful child and loves being a 'big boy' like his sister, who is in Grade 3. We never want to leave school!"



## IMAGINATION AT Play

It's easy to tell we enjoy dressing up and role playing at AEIOU. Our centres really get into the spirit and our staff love having the chance to get extra creative with the children. Book Week and Talk Like a Pirate Day are two of the highlights on our calendar each year and these costumes are among the best we've seen! One of our centres also recently introduced a themed fundraising day to aid the Australian drought relief, with children and staff channelling their most authentic farmhand costumes, with gorgeous effect!



### And Liz's advice for parents about to take the plunge?

 "Don't overthink it. If it doesn't feel right, trust your gut because it's probably not. Absorb as much information about the process as you can, but don't take on so much it feels overwhelming and hard. Stepping back can make you see the big picture and give you that all important perspective! There's no doubt there are many times where it's difficult with ASD kids, but you have to go with the flow as much as possible. Be prepared to make some changes if things aren't working."

# JJ4 ROCKS THE Triffid



**By day, they shake the corporate world, and by night, they rock the Brisbane music scene. Jurassic Jam IV was a record-breaking effort in 2018, with more than \$40,000 raised for AEIOU.**

The annual event, held at The Triffid, brought together eight local bands for a buzzing night of live music and camaraderie.

CEO Alan Smith said the event had grown significantly over the past four years and kept building on its success. "Not only is Jurassic Jam a fantastic night of live music, but we're very fortunate it also has a strong philanthropic focus," he said.

"AEIOU has long enjoyed the support of Scott and Mary-Jeanne Hutchinson, landlords of The Triffid, and as an organisation we're immensely grateful they're always looking for

exciting ways to fundraise and bring awareness, while ensuring everyone has a blast."

A shout out also to the bands for giving Brisbane a reason to party: The Hanovers, Jump the Shark, Shag Rock, Roger The Cabin Boy, The Manilows, The Vinyl Frontier, Mardi Wilson and Rick Hopkins.

**Photography:** Leigh Horwood Photography



## GRASS GREENER THANKS TO BRYAN FOUNDATION

Nathan's playground has never looked so lusciously green, thanks to the support of long-time AEIOU donors, The Bryan Foundation.

The Foundation awarded a \$50,000 grant to AEIOU to lay a large expanse of high-quality AstroTurf, along with the restoration of the existing playground and fort, and installation of new equipment.

The renovations have taken place progressively at the centre over the last six months, with the finished product getting the tick of approval from more than 40 enthusiastic young "testers".



## ACE DAY FOR SECOND GOLF FUNDRAISER

The second annual Coronis Golf Day was a resounding success, with \$19,000 raised for AEIOU Foundation's Sunshine Coast service at Sippy Downs. The event, which was held at North Lakes Golf Club in September, with teams teeing off on 18-holes, while enjoying lunch and dinner with their contemporaries. A heartfelt thank you to the Coronis Real Estate team, along with event founders, the Empringham family, whose son Caelan attends AEIOU.



# AEIOU'S NDIS SUPPORT NETWORK EXPANDS

AEIOU's newest NDIS Support Coordinator Sean Redmond has provided NDIS participants with readiness information since 2014, helping people with disabilities as well as families and carers to understand what to expect from the NDIS.

He strongly believes people have the right to clear, simple and accurate information to enable them to make an informed choice.

"Families and people with disabilities are often disadvantaged and carers are time poor due to their high level of responsibilities," he said. "It's vital they receive timely and succinct information to maximise their outcomes now and into the future."

So, why did Sean choose AEIOU? "Over the past four years I have met many amazing adults with ASD and their stories were all very similar; how hard they had to work to get where they are today, and how hard it's been for them to get any assistance.

"It was obvious that with intensive early intervention, their lives would have been completely different, with more open doors and choices.

"The NDIS, planners and families need to know how vital early intervention is in supporting these incredibly unique children.

"Advocating for ASD kids for a better and brighter future is what drives me and what attracted me to work as an NDIS Support Coordinator at AEIOU."

## OUR TEAM PROVIDES FOR NDIS PLANNING

### *useful tips*

#### Setting goals



- You are the expert in your child's life, not the planner - be explicit about the impact autism has on their day-to-day life;
- Be honest, don't sugar coat your circumstances. Celebrate the progress your child has made, but focus on the work that needs to be done;
- Main goals should be quite general, like improving opportunities for community access, improving social interactions (making friends, engaging with others) and improving communication (therapy type goals);
- Specific goals might include: the difference in cost for 1:1 swimming lessons, cupboard locks, attending a birthday party, communication systems and apps;
- Often families aren't sure what to ask for, so don't be afraid to ask; the planner will soon tell you what can and can't be included in your plan;
- Although hard for carers of young children, try to compare how your family's life is in contrast with ordinary families. Ask yourself, what are they able to do that we are not?;
- The NDIS is the enabler of the funding for the tools you need as a parent to help your child achieve

an ordinary life. Your child's plan will change and grow as they do!;

- What's the catch? Well it's you! The most daunting part of the NDIS is knowing where to go, what services to choose, what supports or aids are out there and what's best for your child, along with learning how best to support them now and into the future. Much of this work falls to families. Having funded supports is only part of the bigger picture. Every 12 months you will be reassessing your child's needs and adjusting/setting new goals.

#### At your meeting



- Take supporting evidence to your meeting, including diagnosis letters and recommendations from therapists, anything you have that backs up your request for intensive supports. If your child has significant needs, you MUST make that clear, both verbally (you have to ask for intensive therapy) and with any formal written evidence;
- Gaining funding to access support workers is possible, but case-by-case. The NDIA sees it as normal parental responsibility. But, it depends on the families circumstances and sometimes it's the only way they can leave the house to access community and social activities;

- Write it down! So many families get to a meeting and forget to ask the planner for things their child needs. Use planning workbooks or a notepad. You will be nervous and it's easy to forget even really important requests;
- Take a trusted friend or family member.

#### So what's next?



- Planners are more concerned with your child's therapy needs rather than focussing on who is going to provide it. If you already know that's great, you can let them know, but you are not expected from the outset to be certain of the services you intend to use;
- Remember, you have full choice and control over your NDIS funded supports. If you try something and it's not working...change it! There is flexibility in all plans. Your therapy budget can only be used for therapy, but you choose the 'who, how and when'. If you have concerns with your service or how it's being delivered, question it!;
- If you have made a mistake or you have had a change in circumstances, you can review your plan. It will take time for the review to happen, just utilise your plan as best you can while waiting.

# "Exciting chapter in AEIOU's story & for the autism community"

## THE SETTER-CHANG FAMILY

At AEIOU, we firmly believe every child with autism in the country should have access to early intervention, and the opening of our purpose-built Logan centre in August unlocks that reality for a whole new community of families on Brisbane's southside.

Among the first through the doors was the Setter-Chang family, who no longer face a long commute to give their beautiful son Charlie the best opportunities to develop vital communication and social skills.

It was over time we noticed Charlie was delayed in speaking and didn't want to socialise with family and daycare peers who he saw regularly. We initially sought speech therapy for him which helped with his vocabulary, but he would still only speak to us, his parents, and not even close family. He was also developing repetitive behaviours, repeatedly licking his chin and observing objects from all angles, and rather than engaging in conversation he would repeat scripts from his favourite TV shows.

While we had suspicions at times that Charlie showed some autism features, we didn't think they were severe enough to result in a diagnosis. We sought a developmental paediatrician's advice to help us address his limited social interaction and we almost expected to be told

we were overthinking things. After the diagnosis, we definitely went through a grieving process for weeks, worrying about how all three of our lives would change and how vulnerable Charlie may become to loneliness and bullying.

Looking back, we are very grateful our paediatrician recommended AEIOU at the appointment and were so fortunate to be offered a place at the Camira centre from the beginning of 2018.

Charlie had just turned three-years-old when he started at AEIOU and we saw the benefits from day one. Charlie would often be unsettled at drop off at his previous daycare. But, before long at AEIOU, he was showing us the door to leave. We have also seen a steady improvement in his social skills. Not to mention he was toilet trained within the first few months and, excitingly, made his first friend, which was such a pleasant surprise for us! This was the first non-family member Charlie has shown a true interest in.

Definitely the most valuable change we have seen in Charlie since he started at AEIOU has been his increasing willingness to communicate and show his personality. Our little boy is coming out of his shell more and more each day which is helping the three of us to bond and giving Angela and I a great deal of happiness. We are quickly realising that, while socialising doesn't come naturally to him, he has many skills (including greater numeracy and literacy than we first realised) and a great sense of humour! As he gains social and communication skills, we are hopeful he will be able to follow

the academic and community pursuits that will fulfil him. Simply, the future would not look so positive without the dedication of all those involved in Charlie's development at AEIOU. All the staff are not only highly skilled, but have a special gift to connect with Charlie and his peers and provide them with a loving, caring environment. They just 'get it' and he bonded with them from day one.

As well as providing the structured program, the staff are always on hand and willing to answer any questions which arise for us with Charlie and even offer home visits if required. This is such a benefit of having daily contact with autism professionals. Having this service saves us needing to visit a private psychologist, paediatrician or other health professional each time such issues arise for us. So many parents have commented that they felt fearful and alone following diagnosis but suddenly saw a bright future with the support of AEIOU. We thoroughly agree!

We have seen how effective the Early Childhood Early Intervention approach has been with Charlie in his short time at AEIOU Camira and have heard of many more success stories across the AEIOU centres. We were lucky that despite the distance, we were still able to commute to Camira in the meantime, but many families may not be, so having a local centre is a huge benefit to those living in Logan and the surrounding areas. It's an exciting chapter in AEIOU's story and for the autism community.



# STAFF SPOTLIGHT



In an organisation like ours, a burning passion to make a difference in young lives is what drives our staff. It's what gets them through the challenging days and similarly, what makes them soar on the good ones. It takes a tightknit team across various professions to keep the service running effectively and the big ideas flowing. We've briefly interrupted the busy days of these three team members to give you a behind the scenes look at some of the roles which form the foundations of the AEIOU family.

## Schahana Clark, Teacher, Camira

### 1. When did you join the AEIOU family?

I joined the AEIOU family in January 2017.

### 2. How would you describe AEIOU in three words?

Inclusive, valuable, supportive!

### 3. What has been your most defining moment with AEIOU?

Bringing a smile to the face of the children and my colleagues after coming to work dressed as my alter ego, Lady Sha Sha.

### 4. What is your personal philosophy?

There is always a silver lining, we just need to look hard enough to find it. Also, smiling is infectious.

### 5. Name someone who inspired you and why?

My friend Cathy is a single mum of five. Three of her children are on the spectrum. She is organised and supportive of her children and is an advocate for all children with ASD. She wears her passion and her heart on her sleeve for all to see and is still able to make the time for a friend in need. She is a superhero.

## Rebecca Fien, Parent Liaison & Fees Coordinator, Central Office

### 1. When did you join the AEIOU family?

I joined in September 2015.

### 2. How would you describe AEIOU in three words?

Absolutely life-changing.

### 3. What is the most rewarding part of your job?

I speak with families generally after they have just received their diagnosis. Throughout their time with AEIOU, I am in regular contact, and so when I get to hear how far their child has come, it is so rewarding. From the first, sometimes emotional call, to when their children then learn skills and hearing the joy in mum and dad's voices, nothing compares!

### 4. What is your personal philosophy?

I believe that everything happens for a reason and if you aren't sure why in that particular moment, just wait because one day it will become clear. When times are challenging, I like to think about this, and it gives me strength to soldier on.

### 5. How do you like to recharge?

I love spending time with my family, particularly my son who is the light of my life! He surely keeps me on my toes and is VERY strong willed, but I wouldn't change a thing.

## Enia Alberto, Program Manager, Townsville

### 1. When did you join the AEIOU family?

I started working at the Townsville centre in July 2018. I moved from Boston in the USA, where I worked with children with special needs for the past 16 years.

### 2. What is your personal philosophy?

I'm a firm believer that every child can learn, we just need to know how to teach. If the child is not making progress, we need to regroup and adapt our strategies.

### 3. What is the most rewarding part of your job?

The job is very rewarding in different aspects; it is very exciting to see the progress and changes in behaviours after strategies are implemented. I just love to hear parent and staff feedback about how well the children are doing and how they are able to engage with different people, and complete routine independently without engaging in maladaptive behaviours. It is exciting to see skills being generalised in the community and family life improving as a consequence.

### 4. Name something pertinent you have learned in the past month?

In the past couple of months I have learned the process for accessing early intervention in Australia, NDIS process and AEIOU culture.

### 5. What was the most interesting role you held before AEIOU?

I'm not sure if I would call it the "most interesting" but working with specialised programs that work with children with different and multiple disabilities (i.e.: ADHD, global delays, PTSD, down syndrome) gave me opportunity to apply the principles of ABA with children outside of the autism community, which was a great learning opportunity but it also strengthened my passion for the field of ABA.



Schahana Clark



Rebecca Fien



Enia Alberto

## WEATHER DOESN'T DAMPEN TAKE A HIKE

# buzz

More than 400 dedicated runners and walkers braved the wild weather in October to put on a united front during the ninth Brisbane Take A Hike. Pounding the puddles, parents pushed prams, children zipped along on scooters and bikes, pooches enjoyed stretching their legs and skilled runners had their eye on the prize. The sea of pink and blue was not to be discouraged by the need for raincoats and umbrellas, with the colourful group still turning heads along the South Bank boardwalk.

At the time of print, the annual event had raised close to \$80,000, with weeks of fundraising still to come. A heartfelt thank you to each person who either registered or supported one of the teams.



## HELP FOR THE JOURNEY

*By Stuart Kruger, founder HELPA and AEIOU parent*

As a parent to my seven year-old son Tyson, who has severe autism, my experiences include the good, the not-so-good, and the 'oh... ok then' bits!

Something that became very clear, very quickly, was the benefits of having a wider social care system which recognises, acknowledges and supports the requirements that we (as parents and carers) have, too.

It's no secret that following a diagnosis of a child or loved one, our life course is altered from that moment on, for the long term.

Have you had any of these thoughts in the past week, month or year? I know we did!

- *I can't be alone! But how can I find who else is going through something similar?*
- *If only I could just ask someone who understands what my child is going through. Anyone, anywhere!*
- *I can't even remember what happened yesterday, let alone last week!*
- *Where did I put that form/ letter/ evidence? I just can't keep on top of it all.*

With 8,760 hours in each year, even if you receive excellent therapy and support during the week, you can't take those specialists home with you. We found ourselves imagining being able to speak to a therapist in real time about a situation which was unfolding right at that moment. No need to wait for the next appointment, no need to drive anywhere – just a chance to deal with that one challenge, right now.

These thoughts, and all of our experiences, were the catalyst for designing HELPA.

It's a digital health app, co-designed by special needs parents and therapists, FOR special needs parents and therapists.

Our goal is to make it easier for families to share their experiences with others, no matter where they are located in the world.

There are some other great features, like being able to store documents digitally, and being able to capture the moments that matter by using image, video, and evidence-based inputs. You can use those tools to share information with participating therapists and clinicians, in real-time.

Already, we're engaging with families in Australia, then NZ, the US and Asia, with encouraging and supportive feedback from well over 1,000 voices involved in the HELPA journey so far.

We now have national partners in three countries, with many more discussions currently underway, and we are the only social care platform that is a partner of the Australian Government Digital Health Cooperative Research Center.

We are very excited and proud to be working with AEIOU as an Australian partner, bringing more support to more families around the country!

Visit [www.helpa.app](http://www.helpa.app)

# "In two months we'd changed countries and were starting at a new 'school'"

## THE KAHUI FAMILY.....

Can you imagine packing up your family and moving to another country to access the early intervention your child needed? The Kahui family did just that, travelling all the way from Japan to the Gold Coast in just six short weeks so three-year-old Jake could make his first day at AEIOU. To top it off, Dad Richard (a former All Blacks player) needed to remain based in Japan for work, meaning Amy would be spending much of her time looking after their three children solo. Many would say it's among the biggest sacrifices a family could make, but for Richard and Amy, it was a black and white decision. They chose the road which gave their son the best opportunities in life.

The future is now so bright for Jake. Moving countries certainly wasn't a decision we made hastily but we wanted what was best for him and if we had to move to England or America, we probably would have done it.

Jake was only diagnosed in December last year at three-years-old, which we know is quite young. It was such a shock for us as a family. The American paediatrician we saw in Tokyo said the best thing we could do for Jake was intensive early intervention. He said if Jake was born in Australia and we had the chance to access these services, it was the only choice. All the research we did across Australia, New Zealand and Japan showed us AEIOU and so we made the call.

I couldn't leave because my (rugby) season hadn't finished, so while I was at work, Amy managed to find a house online and furnish it. There is no better

woman in the world than my wife and she was always going to be that driving force to make sure everyone was happy and had everything they needed. But naturally, it was a really big time for the kids and especially for Jake. In less than two months we'd changed countries, lived in a new house, had a new life and were starting at a new 'school'. And he'd never been away from his Mum or me for more than half a day. It was hard from him to adjust to this whole new environment with new demands.

Already I feel like we've been able to get the most out of AEIOU that we could possibly get. When Jake started he was completely non-verbal, with full-on meltdowns and running away from us. We struggled to take him anywhere. But already, the progress has been so amazing and so tangible. We see the results every day.

We've noticed really clear changes at home with his eating and the way he can now follow instructions. He's started to listen to what we are saying, which is really pleasing. He can request what he wants, can do his alphabet, say the names of all his family members and sing songs. But the biggest milestone I do remember noticing was when he started using PECS. He knew what he wanted and now he could go through the process to ask for it. It was at that moment I knew we'd made the best decision.

When my wife walks into the Gold Coast centre, she feels such love for the teachers. They'll never truly know what they've done for Jake and us as parents. We can function so much better as a family, and it's made

normal day-to-day life so much easier and more enjoyable.

Recently, Amy flew to Japan on her own with the three kids. Normally Jake struggles with affection and doesn't cuddle much, but when I met them at the airport, I gave the kids a kiss and cuddled them all up and walked them out together in my arms. It was a really special moment.

It's a rough old journey to start, and while initially, there's disappointment; with the right help and the best support, the future looks really bright. You need to focus on the days when you get the little wins and really enjoy those. It's also so important to find help because this journey is not one you should do on your own. As we've found, the parents need as much support as the kids. And AEIOU has given us everything we need.

By Richard Kahui



## High tech playmates make research fun

Students at AEIOU Bray Park recently had the opportunity to meet some exceptionally smart and technologically advanced new friends as part of a research opportunity with Robotics @ QUT. Senior Lecturer and Project Leader Dr Christina Chalmers introduced the classes to the NAO humanoid robot, along with BeeBots, BlueBots, and Cubetto, which are being used for education and development for children with special needs.

The children loved interacting with the robots, working on their imitation skills and improving functional play. The highlight was clearly the NAO robot, who danced, walked forward, waved goodbye, and gave out high-fives. We look forward to working with Dr Chalmers and her robots in the future, where she will spend more time working in small groups, pairing the children with different robots.



# CONNECTING WITH OUR ONLINE *community*

Social media allows AEIOU to connect and share our story with current and potential families, generous donors, and the wider community. It's no surprise our top performing Facebook posts are videos of our little superstars reaching milestones, followed by the opening of the new Logan centre. We encourage you to follow our accounts. You can find our Facebook page at [facebook.com/AEIOUFoudation](https://facebook.com/AEIOUFoudation) and Instagram at @aeioufoundation.



## Facebook

**Total Page Likes: 13,700+**



### Top 5 Performing Facebook Posts

#### Toowoomba Superstars

**4.6k** reach  
**235** likes  
**39** comments  
**17** shares



#### New Logan Centre

**3.6k** reach  
**154** likes  
**20** comments  
**6** shares



#### Happy Birthday to Stephen

**6.5k** reach  
**334** likes  
**62** comments  
**18** shares



#### Open Days

**2.9k** reach  
**66** likes  
**4** comments  
**6** shares



#### Chain Reaction - Newspaper

**2k** reach  
**58** likes  
**2** comments  
**3** shares



#### Instagram's most engaging post

**54** likes  
**2** comments



## OUT AND ABOUT.....

We're always eager for an opportunity to get out in the community to speak with families, answer queries and built rapport with our industry colleagues. You may have spotted us at one of the many expos we attended in the past few months, including: KYD-X Kids and Youth Disability Expo (Adelaide), Adelaide Disability, Ageing and Lifestyle Expo, Gold Coast Kids and Parenting Fair and Expo, Sunshine Coast Disability Expo, Ipswich: Fresh Futures Market Expo, Gold Coast Disability Expo, Toowoomba Baby and Toddler Expo, Source Kids Disability Expo (Brisbane) and Ready Set Connect.

We also offer regular free community workshops to provide helpful tips for those supporting young children with an autism diagnosis in a home, educational or healthcare setting. In addition, we include a segment on how families can secure NDIS supports to access early intervention at AEIOU. Information about upcoming events can be accessed via our website.



## VOLUNTEERS THAT

*Shine .....*



### Churchie Boarding House

**Team members:** 75+ students from years 7 - 12

**Event:** Take A Hike Brisbane 2018

More than 75 young leaders from Anglican Church Grammar School (Churchie) volunteered their weekend to take part in AEIOU Foundation's signature fundraising event - Take A Hike Brisbane. The next generation of philanthropists, from the school's Boarding House, offered their services not only as fundraisers and participants, but also working behind the scenes to help manage the heavy lifting and ensure the smooth running of the annual event.

Churchie's Head of Boarding, Jason Wynne-Markham, said it was the school's mission to raise well-rounded citizens not only with big ideas, but also big hearts. "It's our duty to ensure tomorrow's leaders have a social conscience, are compassionate, and also generous with their time," he said. "It's an honour for us to be supporting the delivery of early intervention for young children with autism, so these children can grow up in a world full of opportunities and always feel they have the backing of their community."

## SURPRISE FEAST TO CELEBRATE SUPPORTIVE TEAM .....

Staff at AEIOU Bray Park were showered with gratitude and sweet treats thanks to a surprise afternoon tea organised by parent body representative Thandi. She rallied the troops, and had the support of many parents to organise the event, while staying off the radar. They even arranged to collect their children early so staff could enjoy a rare opportunity to sit around the table together, unwind and enjoy each other's company. What a grand gesture and a testament to the bond developed between our team members and families.



## OUR SUPPORTERS .....



# AEIOU FOUNDATION IS NOW ACCEPTING *enrolments.*

We have 10 centres across Queensland and South Australia.

Speak with our team today on **1300 273 435** or visit [aeiou.org.au](http://aeiou.org.au) for more information.

