

eyes on autism

Issue 26 Summer 2020

IN THIS ISSUE

- 4 Enhancing our Service Model
- 6 Toowoomba celebrates
- 12 Canberra Region centre construction underway

Message

FROM THE CEO & GM

When we reflect on the year, there are some standout moments. The challenges which were presented to us gave us an opportunity to change the way we do things and to explore new, exciting projects.

There are several highlights from the year, including re-opening our Toowoomba service following a major refurbishment. We were joined by the supporters who made the transformation possible: Lyn and Bobbie Brazil, Peter Haeusler, and the Chain Reaction Women's 300 Committee. We were also joined by local families, who shared what it meant to them and their children to be on the receiving end of this support.

Construction is well and truly underway on our new service in Canberra, and we are excited to announce the appointment of Enia Alberto to the position of Regional Manager. Enia, who has been the Program Manager at AEIOU Townsville for 2 1/2 years will take up the role from January 2021.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic we maintained our ability to deliver a high-quality service, even to children who were unable to attend centres in-person through our AEIOU@Home online service. Our staff were well-supported throughout the pandemic and with the loyal support of our donors and friends, we were able to meet our budget this year, despite the very tough conditions.

Despite having to redirect our attention to manage our response to the pandemic, we maintained our focus on our 'business as usual', while taking time to reimagine our future and what we can do to achieve even better outcomes for children enrolled in our centres. Flexibility, choice and control for families has been fundamental in the planning, along with improving workflow for our staff and increasing quality training opportunities for our team members.

In November, we commenced a pilot to put the core elements of our service model enhancements into practice. We selected our Camira and

Townsville centres to support this process. When we return in 2021, we will be delighted to share more about this with you all.

We would like to acknowledge the incredible efforts of our team this year, along with AEIOU's Board of Directors who give their time and expertise to support our organisation.

We also extend our appreciation to our donors and supporters who have remained steadfast in their support despite the economic impact of COVID-19.

Finally, thank you to our families for choosing AEIOU as your partners in early intervention.

We hope you all enjoy the break over Christmas, with an opportunity to relax and spend time with family and friends. Be safe, and we look forward to the New Year.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Smith
CEO

Shane Klintworth
General Manager

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Alan Smith



Shane Klintworth

Acknowledgements

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CHAIR'S MESSAGE

Welcome to the Summer edition of Eyes on Autism. At AEIOU we're approaching this new season and the New Year with a sense of gratitude and optimism. We are no strangers to hard work and there is a real entrepreneurial spirit at AEIOU, at every level. Perhaps this is what stood us in good stead to respond to the challenges we've experienced throughout the year.

Overall, something I've been glad to witness is the sense of community. We've come a long way since we opened our first centre in 2005, and supported thousands of families. We're on a continuous journey of learning and improvement and it's been a great time to reflect on where we are now, and where we'd like to be in the future.

Right before COVID-19 became a stark reality for us all, the Board of Directors took the time to review AEIOU's corporate plan. Working with our senior executives, we have designed a three-year strategic blueprint. As part of this, we redefined our vision and mission for the next stage in our journey.

Our vision is *children with autism living their best lives*. Our purpose is to *enhance the lives for children with autism and their families, through evidence-based, successful early intervention programs and practical support*.

We have established new goals for research, advocacy, our people, our clients and sustainable services, with exciting work already taking place across each of these pillars.

As part of this, we will be adding a series of new programs to our service model throughout 2021. This will provide greater choice and control to families and more learning opportunities for children. This is exciting for all of us at AEIOU, and we keenly await the opportunity to share more about it.

I'd like to thank AEIOU's directors, staff, our clients, friends and loyal supporters for their commitment and support throughout 2020. There are many achievements we are proud of, and there is a great deal to look forward to together as we approach 2021.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Rix AM



Our vision

Children with autism living their best lives.

Our purpose

To enhance the lives of children with autism and their families, through evidence-based, successful early intervention programs and practical support.

Children THRIVE AT AEIOU

Did you know, after just one year at AEIOU, more than 95% of children see improvements in their early learning skills?

Each year, AEIOU helps hundreds of children work towards their individual development milestones, fostering independence, confidence and inclusion.

Our team are just as excited by their progress as the children and their families are!



When comparing the annual assessment data of the children in our service, we can see that over one year:



98.5% of children at AEIOU experienced improvement in their overall communication skills



96.9% of children at AEIOU experienced an improvement with their fine motor skills



95.4% of children experienced improvements with their visual reception



66.7% of children are either fully toilet trained or progressing with their toilet training.



Enhancing OUR SERVICE MODEL



In 2021, we plan to make a series of improvements to our service model. AEIOU's General Manager Shane Klintworth explains our goal is to enable more choice and control for parents and guardians in how therapy and care is delivered to children who attend AEIOU centres.

"Over the past 18 months we've mapped the 'client journey' at AEIOU, consulted with families and staff, and established a project team to consider how we can best support the children with their changing needs," Shane says.

Shane also explains the working environment has changed substantially under the NDIS, and AEIOU needs to adapt to this.

"Not only have we seen changes in the skills and needs of the children we enrol, we have seen increased pressure on our staff, across a range of areas including reporting and assessments."

After establishing a pilot in two centres in the final months of 2020, the plan will be refined before the pilot

is extended across all sites in 2021. "This will happen in stages, with the pilot complete by the end of June."

Part of the changes includes updating the configuration of classrooms in order to deliver some 1:1 therapy, and smaller-group therapy.

"What we'll foster is an environment where team members work with children in groups with ratios no greater than 1:3, mixed with a combination of 1:1 and 1:2 therapy sessions each day," Shane says.

"This is a change we're excited about. It is being implemented in stages, so we can adequately support our team through the changes, and also check it works the way we expect it to, including in the classroom and also in the backend, administratively."

Shane says the early stages of pilot are very positive.

"We're really pleased with what we're seeing so far. Not only are staff energised and enjoying the chance to work even more closely with the children, the children themselves

are benefiting from more learning opportunities which translates to more skills being learned."

"We're very proud of what we do at AEIOU and the curriculum we have established. We will continue to use this as the basis of everything we do. Overall, the service may not 'look' all that different as we progress. But there will be several benefits, right down to families having the chance to participate in their child's therapy sessions from time to time."

The project has been led by AEIOU's Research and Assessment Manager Madonna Tucker, Head of Clinical Delivery Claire McIvor and Head of Service Delivery Louise Nichols, with the support of their teams.

"We can't wait to bring these changes to our centres next year. We will continue to consult with our families and staff, and look forward to sharing more as we move along with the project," Shane said.



NATHAN CENTRE VISITS

A friendly visit by Queensland Ambulance Service and Queensland Police to our Nathan centre proved very exciting for our children as they got to meet our community's everyday heroes. Getting inside the vehicles and making pretend calls over the radio was good fun, but the best thing was when they fired up the sirens and played fictional roles being community helpers. A sincere thank you to Emergency Services personnel for bringing big smiles and all the work they do to keep us all safe.

Early

INTERVENTION IS EVERYTHING



Jett is growing into an amazing young man who has achieved much since he was diagnosed with autism at 2 1/2. He's 14 now.

"I knew something wasn't right when Jett was still a baby. He couldn't speak, go to a playgroup or a shopping centre, or anywhere. He would just stare into the distance and wouldn't respond to his name. There wasn't anything I could do to grasp his attention. He'd sit there all day lining up cars. He'd have outbursts. He would run away, and just not stop. You couldn't catch him, he was really fast.

I talked to many specialists and therapists before eventually seeing a paediatrician who diagnosed Jett with autism. I didn't know what autism was and my family or friends did not have any experience with autism. I didn't know it was a lifelong neurological condition. I was shocked and felt empty and scared. Everything you thought your child would be is taken in that moment, the grief I felt was immense.

It's a sad world when your child is first diagnosed. You're so fragile. It hurts, it really hurts. It's a very hard road for a mum and a dad. It was years before I could come to terms with it fully, I felt depressed and guilty and I avoided doing things like shopping, birthday parties or the 'normal' things. I suddenly felt very isolated. I was 22 when I had Jett, a single mum, and on my own.

Following the diagnosis, I tried to climb into Jett's world. I began reading, researching and watching movies. I thought I could 'find him'. Then one day the therapist told me "you can't fix this" and I realised our life would just be different now.

Jett was three when he started at AEIOU Bray Park. I remember taking my Dad with me to visit the centre. We walked up to the gate and I said I don't think I can do this. I was crying and the centre manager Brigitte could see I was struggling and was

reassuring me saying, "We can help him, we can help him." As I look back, I know I couldn't have done it without them. They changed our life.

So, Jett started full time at AEIOU and went for nearly three years. Jett talked like a bird when he first started, and no one could understand him. He learned to talk more clearly using the Picture Exchange Communication System which included a clipboard with photos. The first thing Jett said was "I want" and he'd point to whatever that was. He was five then, and it was amazing. They helped toilet train Jett and he began to understand instructions and sit next to people.

It wasn't an easy road after AEIOU. Autism Qld was fully booked. He was five and there were no options other than a mainstream school. He would run away, was getting lost and hurdling fences. The special needs assistant at the school said they couldn't cope with him. I'd get a call nearly every day saying he'd gone missing. He'd be hiding in the cupboard in an empty classroom or talking to the ibis birds at the back of the school grounds.

I relocated three times to try and get Jett an education. Jett was six when we moved to a government school for children with autism in Melbourne. It was there that I saw the difference between grown children who didn't have early intervention to those who had. There were kids at 14 or 15 years who weren't talking properly and in diapers. Early intervention is everything. You don't realise it at first, it's not until you're further down the track that you see the longer-term results.

We lived in Melbourne for two years before coming back to Queensland. It was still a process of trial and error before we finally settled in Toowoomba where Jett now goes to St Mary's School. When he was in Grade 7 he only went to school until lunchtime. Then at the end of that year we pushed it a little further and he went three full days. Now he's in Grade 9 and he goes full-time, five days a week.

He's doing fantastic at school. He's happy with in himself. He's safe and in a good environment. They encourage him and the older boys have helped Jett improve his self-esteem. He's part of a good group of young men where he can build his strength.

Over the years, I've really had to advocate for Jett. I've moved three times to get him educated, begged to be heard and cried many times. To other parents I would say 'always believe in yourself'. Don't listen to everybody. Don't think your story is going to be the same as the other child with autism, because it won't be. You can make a difference; you just must keep hope. Eventually you will get to where you need to be.

I never gave up and I put my whole life and everything I had into helping Jett. We are blessed. I'm so grateful he went to AEIOU. The work they did changed Jett's life, and mine.

When Jett completes Year 12, I will feel like we've all done a good job."

By Verity Parnell

You don't realise it at first, it's not until you're further down the track that you see the longer-term results.



Toowoomba

CELEBRATES AFTER MAJOR REDEVELOPMENT

We have officially re-opened AEIOU's 'Rhonda Greensill Centre' in Harristown, Toowoomba following a \$1 million redevelopment. The centre has been completely remodelled with a purpose-designed internal and external fit-out that can support up to 18 young children with autism.

The project was philanthropically funded by long-term supporters Lyn and Bobbie Brazil and Peter Haeusler along with cyclists from Chain Reaction Women's 300, a charitable organisation which supports young children with high needs.

"What makes the AEIOU Rhonda Greensill Centre special is that it's truly one-of-a-kind. It's demonstrative of genuine community spirit, not only from its origins of Rhonda Greensill who championed this service in Toowoomba, but our major supporters, local businesses, schools, and members of the wider community," AEIOU CEO Alan Smith said.

AEIOU Centre Manager Sandy Peachey agrees. "I've been part of AEIOU for over 10 years and have been humbled by the support for the children in our service and the work we do. There's a variety of ways this shines through, including having the opportunity to partner with Goodstart Harristown during construction. They provided us with dedicated classrooms for nearly six months, to ensure our children and families received consistent therapy and support," Sandy said.

Featuring two purpose-built classrooms, the refurbishment also includes a dedicated motor-skills room, a parent room and a therapy room, which are significant 'firsts' for the centre.

"We are all thrilled with the interior fit out, which is tied together with a mural, featuring a young child named Andy, in honour and recognition of Andrew Morton, who inspired the establishment of AEIOU Foundation in the beginning. The theme is based on a rural, regional setting to reflect our Toowoomba lifestyle," Sandy said.

The centre has newly created outdoor play spaces, with new equipment and swings to capture the children's imagination. The centre was designed by Buchan Architects and constructed by Hutchinson Builders both of whom are trusted partners of AEIOU Foundation. It's fantastic to see the children continue to thrive in their new facility.

Aurizon Community Giving Fund donated funds for the construction of a new shade sail over our new AEIOU Toowoomba outdoor play area. The children are loving the sun safe environment, and so are the staff!



AND THEY'RE RACING...

We were delighted to be named Charity Partner by The Grove and The Emporium Hotels in Brisbane for their Melbourne Cup events on Tuesday 3 November. These were the first corporate fundraising events we had the opportunity to be part of post-COVID restrictions, and we extend our thanks to everyone who made this a spectacular event. We also must give a special mention to our tremendous volunteers who generously gave their time on the day.

Matari

LOVES TO SING AND RIDE HIS SCOOTER



Matari is an Aboriginal word meaning 'a man'. He comes from a proud indigenous family on the Southern Downs. He's five and was diagnosed with autism just after his second birthday. His Mum, Christina, shares some of their journey.

"When Matari was still very little I noticed there was something a bit different to his development compared to my other children. He was not responding to his name and he wasn't saying anything apart from what he saw on TV. He wasn't really talking much and he'd stopped doing things that he had been doing, such as clapping and waving goodbye. He would line up any toy he was playing with and it didn't matter what it was. He was quiet, didn't sleep much and wasn't interested in other kids.

We took him to the doctor who referred us to the 'Mums and Bubs' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service (ATSICHS) at Logan where a speech therapist, occupational therapist and paediatrician were all under one roof. Being able to go to an indigenous clinic was great because they understood where we were coming from.

I was very emotional and upset the day the paediatrician told me Matari had autism. It wasn't that I thought his life was over, but I was so sad to think that he was not going to be like the other kids. I didn't know anything about autism and I even asked if I needed to take him out of day care. I started doing a lot of reading about autism.

The clinic had an autism support group and we went along. It was one of the mums who came to this group who told me more about AEIOU, she had an older child attend. At that time, there was an AEIOU centre being built at Logan so when it opened it seemed to work out perfectly for us. Though, if it wasn't for the other mum who told me about it, I probably would never have found it.

It was August 2018 when Matari started with AEIOU, he was three. At his first AEIOU assessment, the staff asked a lot of questions and watched him play. I felt very comfortable and it was easy to talk to them. I liked that they could watch him and get an idea of where he was at, so it wasn't just about what I was saying. We talked about what Matari's goals would be and the team really listened to what I hoped for Matari to achieve.

I was nervous about Matari going to AEIOU full-time - he was only going two days a week to day care. But I had nothing to worry about. He transitioned well and didn't get upset. All it took was one day and he was happy to go back the next. He's been going five days ever since.

Now, Matari can say more words. He says just one word, or a couple of phrases, to communicate what he wants. We can usually understand him and he's much less frustrated now than when we first started. He's also doing well with toilet training too. There was a time I thought he would never be out of nappies, and he used to have a bottle up until he was five. AEIOU has helped him learn and adapt to change. Some of the things that I thought were going to be difficult, were not.

At AEIOU, the occupational therapist has developed a sleep strategy for Matari which we have been following at home. It's a board with pictures of dinner, pyjamas, bed, reading time and sleep with those words alongside them. We work through them every night and Matari has adjusted to those prompts well. He mainly sleeps through the night now: it's been a big change for me!

Matari loves anything outdoors. He loves swings, slides, and the trampoline. His favourite thing to do is ride on the scooter and he's good at it too! He's still not too interested in the other kids; he's only just started playing with his older siblings, which has been great progress.

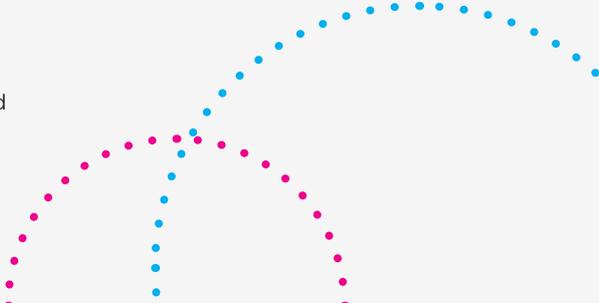
One of the best things about Matari is the way he can sing songs and how happy it makes him. He starts to sing as soon as he wakes up. And, he'll sing anything he might have been watching, or what he hears on the radio. His memory is amazing, he seems to pick the song words up immediately. His favourite song is "I love my teddy bear".

Next year, Matari will go to Logan Special School. It will be another change and there will be new things to learn so the AEIOU team and I will talk about how to transition him. It might not be easy, but we can do it.

My advice to other parents would be to find a support group. It is always good to talk to other parents that are going through or have been through the same thing as you. Don't be afraid to speak up for your child, you are their voice and know what's best for them!"

By Christina Dallen

Don't be afraid to speak up for your child; you are their voice and know what's best for them!





Levi LOVES BLUEBERRIES AND RIDING HIS BIKE

Levi's Dad, Nick, shares some of his journey. The family has been camping for the first time, something they never thought they could do.

"Levi developed typically up until he was about 12 months. It was then he stopped achieving the milestones he was meant to be. His Mum noticed it a lot quicker than I did. Me being me, I thought 'he'll be fine', 'he's a late bloomer' and 'give him some time.'

Levi was 2 1/2 when he was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder by a paediatrician. It was instantly a relief for my wife. Having it medically recognised unlocked the support we could get for Levi. Even at that time though, I was still in denial. In my mind I thought 'he'll be fine.' It wasn't until Levi's third birthday when my wife put a post on Facebook that it dawned on me. This was real. It was a light bulb moment. Finding out your son's mind works a little bit different is difficult to deal with.

At the time of Levi's diagnosis, we didn't know what to do; we'd never faced it before. AEIOU had been referred to us by a friend and it turned out to be quite coincidental, or not, that we were living nearby a centre.

Levi's been attending AEIOU for 18 months now. It's been lifechanging. We've learned how to teach him life skills and to better understand how his mind works.

When we first started at AEIOU our goal was to get him to a point where he could attend a mainstream school. We've realised now though, that's not the right environment for him. We think the longer he's at AEIOU the better, and we have NDIS funding until mid-next year. He'll be slightly older when he starts school but it's important we find the right environment.

Levi is making leaps and bounds. If you said to me six months ago, or even 12 months ago, that he'd be doing what he is now, I'd be in disbelief. Every two weeks he's coming up with something new.

We went camping, for the first time! We were worried he'd run off with strangers and he doesn't toilet too well. We had a great time, and Levi was fantastic. His grandparents recently brought him his first bike and he's now madly riding around the house.

He's so much more vocal now than he was too. Something we've learned is that it's not that he can't do it. That's what I'm most grateful for. AEIOU has taught us how to deal with autism, how to teach Levi and give him the tools for learning for life.

People can underestimate Levi because he doesn't talk a lot and they think you must talk to him like a baby. That's just not the case. Levi's speech is all about motivation. He can recite the alphabet backwards if you're holding a chocolate ice-cream in front of him.

The other day we got an email from the centre saying he'd mastered eight single use instructions. I laughed out loud, because we know now, he's listening and understands every single word. We can issue complex instructions and if we've got his attention, he knows. And, our own thinking has changed - we don't have to do everything for him.

I love that Levi is just a happy easy-going kid. He loves blueberries and fruit, riding his bike and he doesn't have a worry in the world. That's a cool perspective that he's got.

For the future, deep down I know Levi is always going to be happy. He's in this little world which none of us understand what that looks like to him. He's obviously having a ball."

By Nick Ellis

Finding out your son's mind works a little bit different is difficult to deal with.



A SPLASHING DAY OUT

Each centre plans a variety of excursions and incursions each year, to help children and families access the community. Most of these were cancelled throughout 2021, but highlights towards the end of the year included a trip to Sea World for some of our children.

Families from Camira chose this excursion, and eagerly awaited the opportunity to visit all year. The children loved seeing the animals and exploring the touch tanks. It was a sensory experience which proved sublime!

COVID-19 UPDATE

Going into 2021, we've been glad to see many of the restrictions in place for COVID-19 begin to relax. All centres practised COVID-safe plans and maintained increased hygiene measures, temperature checks and revised drop off and pick up procedures which were put in the place at the onset of the pandemic. AEIOU@Home and our Parent Training Workshops were put in place to support families at times when they were unable to access the service, particularly in the heart of the pandemic. It's in challenging times that innovation is often born.

AEIOU@Home

AEIOU@Home was developed by our senior therapists and educators in April to support families who were self-isolating. Beyond its use in COVID, this service has been used in other scenarios, including for families in Toowoomba while their team facilitated a week-long move into their refurbished centre. A family survey demonstrates the value of this type of service, with families reporting

positive experiences. One family explained, "It helped to keep my child on track."

Online Parent Training and Workshop sessions

Our Parent Training and Workshop sessions are currently delivered entirely online in webinar format. Each AEIOU family can access these free sessions for up to a month after the live session. They are also available to families on our waitlist. Webinars are developed and delivered by our experienced team of senior allied health and education professionals. Popular topics have included *Play skills: more than just fun and games*, *Building instructional skills with your child*, *Preparing for 'big school'*, *Modelling language at home*, *Teaching imitation using play and social skills*. Families are frequently telling us these sessions are "highly informative", "engaging" and "clear and easy to follow". We look forward to refining and expanding our training opportunities throughout 2021.



EXTRA EMOTIONAL SUPPORT DURING A TIME OF NEED

At AEIOU we're fortunate that our team and families are part of a community that supports each other. We offer our team and also our families extra support through our Employee Assistance Program which is delivered by our independent provider, Assure Programs. If they have worries about finances, work, or issues at home they can talk to someone independently outside of their work and home life.

AEIOU families and staff are able to receive up to five counselling or coaching sessions at no cost every year and can receive referrals to other professional services.

Emergency support is also available 24/7. Assure Programs can help people facing:

- general feelings of anxiety or depression
- feeling overwhelmed
- personal issues
- family challenges
- loss of work
- absence from or returning to work
- grief and loss.

AEIOU's families and staff can contact Assure Programs at 1800 808 374 or info@assureprograms.com.au.

Little THINGS MEAN A LOT



Emileigh is a loving and affectionate little girl. She'll be 6 next February.

"When Emileigh was about 20 months we got a phone call from her kindy. They wanted to have a meeting with Holly (Emileigh's Mum) and myself. When we went to meet them, they said they thought she had autism.

Emileigh was referred to an autism clinic and an in-depth assessment took place. She was observed at Kindy and at home, on several occasions, before she was diagnosed with Level 3 autism.

I always knew deep down something wasn't feeling quite right. But really, I didn't want to know. Nobody wants their child to have anything 'wrong' with them. When she was diagnosed, I didn't deal with it the greatest.

I sort of hid, if that makes any sense. I was keeping everything to myself, and I didn't really want to talk about it. Only my close family knew. It took me a while to contend with Emileigh's diagnosis.

I thought about Emileigh's future, and it really weighed on my mind. How would Emileigh grow and live her life? Kids can be cruel, life can be, and I didn't want her to become a victim, or be bullied or harassed. We thought about leaving things as is - keeping her at kindy and going about things just as we had with Emileigh's older sister and brother.

I was following Matty Rogers on Instagram at the time, he has children with autism, and he was talking about AEIOU. So, we did some research. The time soon came to visit a centre and I remember I had this vision in my mind of what it was going to be like. It really scared me. It's amazing what you can think, when you don't understand.

When I walked into the Gold Coast centre, it was just amazing. I felt an immense relief, and I cried. It was fantastic. We all went in: Emileigh, Holly and me. It was a very emotional time.

Emileigh was four, when she started at AEIOU.

Since she has been there, I feel like I've got to know her more. To understand who she really is, as her own little person. I also have much greater awareness of children with special needs and what parents go through. I've gone from being a bit of a pigheaded person who would only see things how I wanted to, to being open and really appreciating all the small things in life. With all of its ups and downs.

In a way, Emileigh saved my life. She made me realise what life is supposed to be. She's made me see what's important and what's not. Emileigh has done more for me than anyone will ever know.

If you could bottle up all the good things of autism, Emileigh has it. She's loving. She's cuddly. She craves physical touch. She loves loud noises and vibration. Emileigh communicates when she wants to. She can be quite stubborn when she wants to be too.

Emileigh is happy to go AEIOU, every day. The staff are very understanding and accepting. This is probably one of the greatest things I have experienced, the acceptance. Having a child with autism is like a rollercoaster, for everybody.

The little things mean a lot. Like sitting down to eat. These are the things that people don't understand. Emileigh used to just wander around. She puts shoes on now, she never used to do that, and, she wears them! To most people that's not a big deal, but to someone who understands what these small achievements mean, they know that these are the special things.

The workshops AEIOU offer are a great support. It's where you get to meet other parents and realise, you're not alone. You get to see the progress of the other children and families too. It's really nice to be part of that.

Sometimes, people just need to talk to somebody. That's important. You've got to be there for people because you don't know what they're going through. If you can help someone then, that's what you do. It's also okay, not to be okay. We have good days and not so good days. There are days I struggle, and others where I don't. It's all about taking it day by day.

When Emileigh started at AEIOU, I went in with the intention that she'd come out 'fixed.' I know better now; she was never broken. She's my child and she's so beautiful, that's all that matters.

I couldn't imagine my life, or my daughter's, any other way. Emileigh's perfect."

By Ben Sparrow

I went in with the intention that she'd come out 'fixed.' I know better now, she was never broken.



CANBERRA REGION CENTRE, *coming soon*

Construction is well underway on our new Canberra Region centre located at Garran. Following the first concrete pour in September, the facility has taken shape. The building's external work is complete and internal fit out is underway. Our team continue to spend time in Canberra to meet with health professionals, NDIS representatives and members of the community to share details about AEIOU's service and how we may work together to support families with young children with autism.

We are pleased to have appointed Enia Alberto as the Canberra Regional Manager. Enia is currently the Program Manager at AEIOU's Townsville centre, a position she held for more than two years.

"It has been really exciting to visit Canberra and see the centre come out of the ground. We expect to enrol around 20 children when we first open, and will slowly increase our enrolment capacity to 48 placements before long."

Enia says the facility will feature four classrooms, dedicated therapy spaces, breakout and training rooms along with outdoor playgrounds which have been purpose-designed for young children with autism.

"Not only is the centre taking shape, we are also starting to recruit our team. We'll be hiring a range of team members, including therapists and early childhood educators.

I'm really looking forward to joining the community in Canberra and bringing our team together to work with local families," Enia says.

Enia, who moved from the United States, when she accepted a role at AEIOU, explains she was excited to have an opportunity to share her knowledge and provide the best possible supports for children and their families. "At AEIOU, I'm able to do just that. The opportunity to bring AEIOU's mission and vision to life in the Canberra community is a great honour. I believe that when we support families we improve our communities."

The project for the Canberra region has been made possible by a unique partnership between AEIOU and the John James Foundation, who are not only funding the construction of the facility but also developing, project managing and retaining the building.

The service will form part of the broader John James Village precinct, and consolidates the John James Foundation's commitment to strengthening health outcomes in the community.

Enrolment enquires are open now. If you'd like to know more contact info@aeiou.org.au or call 1300 273 435. For information about recruitment opportunities contact humanresources@aeiou.org.au or call the above number.

Enia Alberto



TRIPLE IMPACT GIVING DAY.....

This time last year, no one could ever have imagined what 2020 would bring. It has been a year like no other for every single one of us. Like many others, AEIOU was forced to cancel nearly all fundraising events across the year, leaving a significant funding shortfall for our 10 centres. On our Triple Impact Giving Day, your donation will help to ensure that the children who attend AEIOU centres can continue to be supported to achieve their individual goals, access their community and live their best lives with their families.

On 9 December, your donation will be tripled by our generous corporate supporters and funds raised will provide essential educational resources, increase our service reach and contribute to vital research projects. Your donation will make a real difference! To donate, please head to tripleimpactday.com.au.



\$250

Art & Craft Resource Kit

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY: BUILDING LIFE-LONG SKILLS



Occupational therapy refers to the everyday activities that people do to occupy time and bring meaning and purpose to life. For children with autism, many 'occupational roles' require specific targeted support to learn. What is occupational therapy and how does it fit into AEIOU's programs? It's a common question we get asked. Our Program Co-ordinator and Senior OT, Kate Schatz, explains.

"Firstly, much of the confusion about occupational therapy lies in the term itself: occupation. In plain terms, it refers to the everyday activities that people do to occupy their time and bring meaning and purpose to their life. Ultimately, an occupational therapist works with people to develop skills so that they're able to do what they want and need to do everyday.

For children with autism, many of these occupational roles do not effortlessly develop, and instead require specific targeted support to learn. The great news is that with the right intervention early on, these skills can be learned!

At AEIOU, we focus on areas according to the needs of each child. This is spread across a range of areas, including self-help skills such as toilet training, teeth brushing, washing hands, mealtimes and so on. We also focus on play skills, social skills, fine motor skills and gross motor skills.

Families will know how challenging these areas can be. It's often quite a long process of getting the children to a point where they're achieving their goals.

It's incredibly rewarding to see the progress along the way, as we celebrate each step just as much as when they achieve actual goals. We love helping a child to learn to use the toilet rather than a nappy, using toys in a functional way to play with others, tasting different foods, brushing teeth, getting dressed, doing up buttons, using a pencil, or climbing or jumping.

At AEIOU, we provide children with the life skills to be a functioning member of society, by concentrating on the skills that the child needs to engage in their everyday life. This may mean breaking down skills into small achievable steps with a lot of support and reinforcement in order to work towards a long-term goal.

To teach a child to go to the toilet, for example, we may put in place a program to increase the child's fluid intake so they need to go to the toilet frequently (even every five minutes!) and give them their most favourite thing when they wee in the toilet. This means a child has plenty of chances to be and feel successful ... and get the good stuff! This may just be the first step on the road to independent toileting. Before this even occurs, an occupational therapist will have

already helped embed teaching pre-requisite skills such as being able to sit on the toilet, wear underwear or follow a toileting routine.

I believe that if a child is not learning a skill, it is my responsibility as a therapist to modify my approach so that the child can develop the skill. We need to set the children up for success in order for them to learn.

At AEIOU we have a wonderful group of dedicated occupational therapists who work very hard with parents and the children. I'm proud to be an occupational therapist and part of such a great team."

Kate Schatz, AEIOU Program Co-ordinator and Senior Occupational Therapist

If a child is not learning a skill, it is my responsibility as a therapist to modify my approach so that the child can develop the skill.



\$1,000

Trikes for play to learn



Give NOW and TRIPLE your impact to help kids with autism live their best lives.

DEC 9

SAM'S A *Shining star*

Samuel, aka Sam, Sheppard attended AEIOU at Park Ridge in 2007. Fast forward to October 2020, Sam has returned to our Nathan centre where he's undertaking student placement as part of his secondary schooling to develop his work readiness skills. Centre Manager Samantha Hayden said: "Sam has brought an extra spark to the centre and the children and team adore him. As a team, we have so much input into the early years of a child's life, it's very rewarding to see them progress and ready to succeed in the longer term and know that we have helped to make that happen."

During his work placement, Sam composed and performed a song on his electronic guitar. The children and team jived along!



The Kids Threw A Party In AEIOU,
The Class Band Was There & They Began To Wail,
Everyone Was Partying & Began To Rock,
You Should've The Classbirds Say Let's Rock,
Come On Let's Rock,
Everybody In AEIOU Was Dancing To The AEIOU Rock,

Luca Played Tenor Symbols,
Nickieta Was Singing & Joining The Fun,
Samantha The Manger Went Crash, Bang, Boom,
The Whole Room Was The Rocking Gang Let's Rock,
Come Let's Rock,
Everybody In AEIOU Was Dancing To The AEIOU Rock.

Number 17-12 You're Cutest The Rock Kid I Ever Did See,
If You Wanna Join The Fun Than Join Along,
Come On Do The AEIOU Rock With Me,
Let's Rock, Come On Let's Rock,
Everybody In AEIOU Was Dancing To The AEIOU Rock
COME ON LET'S ROCK,

INSTRUMENTAL SOLO DDDDDDDD, AAAAAA, GGGG,
EEEEEE, ADADADADA,

Chair Sack Was Sitting On A Block Of Tables,
Over In The Room Weeping All One,
Christie Said Hey Alfie Don't You Be No Square!
If You Can't Find A Friend Use A Teacher Instead Let's Rock,
Come On Let's Rock, Everybody In AEIOU Was Dancing To
The AEIOU Rock.

Rocking Hayden Said For Classroom Sake,
No One's Looking Now Our Chance To Rock N Roll,
Band Turned Rock & Said Excellent! We Wanna Stick
Around While We Rock N Roll Let's Rock, Come On
Let's Rock, Everybody In AEIOU Was Dancing To The
AEIOU Rock,

Dancing To The AEIOU Rock X8! Everybody In AEIOU Was
Dancing To The AEIOU Rock,
(HUGE FINISH On D Chord)

Lyrics by Sam Sheppard

Access

THE RIGHT SUPPORT SOONER RATHER THAN LATER

Before AEIOU, Remy was self-harming, aggressive and erratic. Life has changed now and Remy's parents, Melinda and Robert, say the sooner you can access the right support the sooner you can start to turn it around.

"Remy was 18 months when I just knew something was different. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, but it was enough for me to mention my concerns to our GP at one of Remy's routine check-ups. The doctor found that Remy was within the normal developmental range for a child of his age, so decided to reassess Remy in six months to see how he was going.

By that time, Remy's speech had dropped off completely. He had severe separation anxiety. He was self-harming and hurting me and he was so aggressive towards me and my husband. We were getting black eyes and busted noses. It was rough, it was escalating and out of control.

It really came to a crunch when Remy was in day-care. At the time we had no idea that we were dealing with autism. The centre had reassured us that no matter what was going on they could look after Remy. For us though, that didn't turn out to be the case and we felt really let down in the end. There were incidents with Remy's care and it was devastating for us when the staff at the centre said, "he's too hard" and "we can't cater for what's going on". They said he "wasn't a good fit". Looking back at that now, it was a horrible time and I'm so glad we found AEIOU.

At Remy's next doctor appointment, we obtained a referral to see a paediatrician. We saw two before Remy was diagnosed with autism; the first paediatrician said he was okay. When Remy was diagnosed with autism, we were fortunate that we were able to receive NDIS funding and got Remy into an early childhood development program for children with autism quickly. We found though, it just wasn't enough.

Being able to understand what he needed or wanted was like a game of charades.

When we found AEIOU, we thought the cost would be out of our range, but that wasn't the case and the NDIS funding was able to cover Remy's program. We visited AEIOU Toowoomba and I must admit we saw some of the children at different ends of the spectrum which we found upsetting. Some parents might find a walk through a centre very confronting, but now I know they're not seeing those children when they first enter and how much they've improved. We felt it was the best place for Remy because he needed intensive support. We thought we'd give it a try and if it didn't fit, well; we'd just see what to do from there. We have found the gains so significant, there's never been a time where we thought we didn't make the right decision.

Remy started at AEIOU Toowoomba in September of 2019. Initially the team focussed on his separation anxiety because Remy spent most of the day crying, so they worked hard to build trust with him. Then, they focussed on his speech. When he started, he was saying about two words: dad and bye bye. Now, he says so many. Remy's recently been toilet trained too. We've been trying for well over 12 months and then one day he just started to go on his own. He was ready to do it on his own terms. Now, he's in underwear!

During May we did AEIOU@home with Remy. He did well with online learning and it's helped to keep him on track. Recently, we had a progress meeting with the Occupational Therapist and Speech Therapist. They think that if he keeps continuing the way he is, he may be able to go to a mainstream school. We haven't really thought to far ahead, but it was amazing to hear he might be ready.

It's difficult for people to understand what it's like to have a child with autism. It's the small things that count, and the tiny things that other family's take for granted. One night we were

eating dinner and Remy passed something that was on the dinner table to me and said "Mumma". You get excited about these things as a parent, but even more so when your child has been so limited in talking. It's these little milestones that make a difference. Remy calls me Mum now.

Thinking back, before Remy started at AEIOU, not being able to understand what he needed or wanted was like a game of charades. There are so many words he can say now. He can say "yes" or "no". Self-harming doesn't happen anymore. There is minimal harming of myself or my husband. If it does occur, it's usually triggered by extreme fatigue. Day to day, he's not violent at all.

To other families, I would say trust your instincts. Even when we saw a paediatrician initially who told us that Remy wasn't autistic, and my husband said "see you were worried over nothing" I trusted my instincts. If I didn't, we'd be in a lot of trouble. If you've got any doubts always seek a second opinion. Even if it's just for your peace of mind.

Early intervention has changed Remy's life, and our life as a family. We're so proud of our little boy, and all he has achieved through the support of the team at AEIOU."

By Rob & Melinda Luscombe



Speak WITH OUR NDIS TEAM TODAY

AEIOU is proud to have a dedicated team of NDIS Support Coordinators to help map out your next steps so your family can receive the best outcome possible.

Our support service is **FREE** to all families who hope to enrol at AEIOU Foundation.

Phone **(07) 3320 7500** and ask for Katrina or Sean, or email **info@aeiou.org.au**.



OUR SUPPORTERS

