

eyes on autism

Issue 24 Summer 2019



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Message FROM THE CEO & GM

Summer brings a great opportunity to pause, reflect and look ahead. It's a time spent with family, recognising achievements and setting goals. In addition to providing genuine care and support to each family in our service throughout 2019, our team took on a number of new projects with gusto. We have introduced a webinar series for families, which will expand in 2020, additional community experiences to support our children and their families, and a number of exciting research projects, which you can read more about within this magazine.

Perhaps most exciting, was the creation of a digital application, developed in partnership with Biarri. The result is two tools, including 'Little Steps', an internal app which will help our team to collect and analyse the data captured for each child's individual plan. The second is aeiou+me, an app which will help us to share therapy updates with families.

Our advocacy for children and families navigating the early years of an autism diagnosis continues at all levels of government and directly with the National Disability Insurance Scheme. Our dedicated NDIS team continues to provide exceptional support and guidance to families, ensuring every child has the best opportunity to access the therapy, care and support they need.

We have been part of some extraordinary fundraising events and initiatives, and welcomed valuable support from our ambassadors over the summer months. As we look ahead to our 15th year of operation, there is much to be grateful for, and equally a great deal yet to achieve in the space of early intervention. On that note, we would like to thank the team at AEIOU, the families in our service and the very special individuals and organisations in our community who generously give to AEIOU to make it possible to do what we do. We hope

you enjoy reading all of this news as well as some heartfelt family stories shared within the summer edition of Eyes on Autism.

Sincerely,

Alan Smith
CEO

Shane Klintworth
General Manager



CHAIR'S MESSAGE

Recently, I've taken great pleasure in getting into our community, meeting our staff, families and the supporters who help ensure AEIOU Foundation is able to continue doing what we do best; deliver high-quality early intervention for children with autism.

AEIOU is poised for growth, expanding our service with additional placements locally in Queensland, and also across state borders into the Australian Capital Territory.

Something I am personally excited about is the field of research and how we can use this to improve our reach to children and families who live in regional and remote areas. AEIOU has a number of research projects in train, which will provide practical resources and information that could shape the way we deliver our service, and assist clinicians in the private sector also.

The year 2020 marks the 15th anniversary of AEIOU Foundation's operations and I am very proud of what our team has achieved across the span of these years. Change and growth is inevitable, and it is not always comfortable, particularly with major reforms such as the NDIS. However, our team has risen to every challenge and I know it is the connections they develop with each family, and each other, which drive them forward.

I extend my sincere thanks to the team members at AEIOU, and each supporter who has helped to make our service a reality to so many families over a 15 year period.

Sincerely,

Susan Rix
Chair



Acknowledgements

Cover Photography: Unveil Films & Photography

Graphic Design: Chapter Agency

Printing: Worldwide South Brisbane

Editor: Alyce Valentine-Berrett

Issue number: 24



THE DEUBLE Family

So much has changed in just a year for the Deuble family. They've moved to Brisbane from Sydney to give their first-born son the greatest gift possible – early intervention. Looking back, they have so much to be thankful for. New friendships, a wide support network of people who just 'get it', and a beautiful boy who has blossomed into a social butterfly. It's more than they could have ever dared to dream for. And this journey started with an article clipped from a local newspaper by a devoted great-grandmother. It's something mum-of-two Lauren will always be grateful for.

"We have two beautiful boys – Theodore, 4, and Max, 2. They're the best of buds and my husband Josh and I absolutely adore them. Theodore was the child we never thought possible, after being told we might not be able to fall pregnant.

Having never been around other children (or adults, for that matter) with autism, we didn't see the signs until a couple of family members gently drew our attention to his lack of eye contact and words. He also stimmed a lot, flapping his hands and banging his ears. After Theodore's diagnosis, we felt overwhelmed with the information overload and lost in a world unknown to us.

My Granny was always telling me about the beautiful stories she'd read about other children with autism, but we felt like Theodore needed so much more support than we could find in New South Wales. During a brief visit to see family in Brisbane, Granny handed me a little article that she'd seen in her local newspaper about a centre called AEIOU. I had never heard of it and was intrigued by what I read. I decided to call AEIOU and find out more. What could it hurt, I thought. Little did I know that phone call would change our life.

AEIOU is one of the best things that's ever happened to our little family. During his first weeks, we were quite surprised by how quickly Theodore transitioned into the program. He had never attended therapy for more than two hours a week, and I feared that this would be far too much for him. How wrong I was! I was so surprised that within a couple of days he was dragging me out of the house to take him to AEIOU!

During these early days, Theodore struggled a lot with his language and connecting with others. He battled with transitions between day-to-day activities. He wasn't toilet trained, or able to regulate his emotions. He had frequent meltdowns as a result of all this.

But less than a year later, he is talking constantly. He is a social butterfly, who loves going to AEIOU to see his amazing group of friends. He is toilet trained and has learned how to express when something is bothering him. He also no longer stims. The old Theodore would always repeat what we would say, not asking questions for himself. But he is now one of the most inquisitive and curious little kids we know, constantly asking questions and exploring his environment. My husband and I feel so much more peace within our family and confident about spending time out together. We can do shopping trips as a whole family now, and even go swimming.

We just adore the staff at AEIOU: this was one of our first and most lasting impressions. We have been able to talk to them about a multitude of things, ask them countless questions and see lots of progress at home and in the community as a result of their hard work and dedication to our child.

And almost above all, we love the community AEIOU has welcomed us into! Coming from a place where we

didn't know anyone with a child with autism, we felt so isolated. But now, I have made the most amazing friends. We understand each other's struggles, give love and support where possible and are in constant contact. We catch up regularly, have playdates, parties and so much fun! I know in my heart that these parents are going to be in my life for the long haul. I think it's so important to feel like you aren't walking this path alone.

We often reflect on life B.A. (before AEIOU) and can't wrap our heads around how far Theodore has come. Without AEIOU, we truly believe Theodore would still be struggling socially, having a really tough time with his expressive and receptive language, and that we would be living with constant meltdowns. When you've lived through the sadness and difficulty of not knowing how to help your child, it's a horrible feeling. There are no words. Even in myself, I feel like a happier mum, because AEIOU has equipped both Theodore and our family with the tools to help him with his future.

We are still pinching ourselves at the realisation Theodore will be able to go to school in 2020. We had no idea that he would come so far so quickly! I think we can all expect to see him adjusting to life in school, making new friends and adapting to the world around him with more ease and less hesitation. He has so much to offer and so much to learn. We hope he will embrace this life with all he's got.

And to think, it all started with a little newspaper clipping handed to me in a moment of need. It goes to show, it's always the right time to spread the word. You never know whose lives you could change. Next year, it could be another family just like mine."

By Lauren Deuble

Guides HELP CLINICIANS SUPPORT COMMUNICATION GOALS FOR CHILDREN WITH MINIMAL VERBAL LANGUAGE

Children with autism will be better supported by treating clinicians in their communication development, thanks to a series of new clinical guides recently launched by AEIOU Foundation, in partnership with the Menzies Health Institute at Griffith University and the Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centres (ASELCCs), located across Australia.

With support from the partnering ASELCCs, Dr Madonna Tucker (AEIOU Foundation) and Associate Professor David Trembath (Menzies Institute, Griffith University) produced the series of guides to give practical support to therapists and paediatricians working with children with minimal verbal language.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The guides were launched at AEIOU Foundation’s Brisbane headquarters, with award-winning journalist and columnist Kylie Lang facilitating a panel of industry experts, which included Associate Professor Beth Saggars, Chair of the AEIOU Research and Innovation Committee, and AEIOU parent Clare O’Brien.

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

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

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

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

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



AEIOU WELCOMES NEW GM

AEIOU Foundation is pleased to welcome Shane Klintworth as the new General Manager of Operations & Corporate Services, upon the retirement of Greg Johnson.

Shane is community-minded and his track record in both leadership and operational roles in the disability and profit-for-purpose sectors in QLD reflect his passion and commitment to helping others.

Most recently Shane has been the Director of Service Delivery at Third Sector Australia, responsible for the northern NSW and southern QLD region. Prior to the role, he was the Executive Director for St Vincent de Paul on the Gold Coast and CEO of Relationships Australia (QLD).

“I’m thrilled to join AEIOU Foundation, and to work in a service which is achieving such significant change through early intervention,” he said.

“Already, I have been struck with how committed and dedicated the staff are to achieving positive outcomes for the children they work with. I sincerely look forward to giving each of the teams my full support.”

When he’s not at work, Shane spends his time at home with his wife and three teenage children. Together, the family enjoy triathlons, AFL and soccer.



Bald Hills AUTISM HUB TO OPEN DOORS FOR FAMILIES

Construction is now complete on North Brisbane’s new autism hub at Bald Hills.

The state-of-the-art facility will warmly welcome staff and up to 50 families in January, ahead of an official opening event anticipated in late February.

The centre, located at 40 Attunga Street, will eliminate the area’s waiting lists for intensive early intervention, while also offering the community valuable research, training and outreach services.

AEIOU CEO Alan Smith said the hub would not only benefit the children who walk through the door, but also their families and the wider community.

“We know early intervention is life-changing,” Mr Smith said. “But that reach is so much greater than many realise.”

“As a community, we become more aware, more inclusive, and more understanding.”

“This in turn helps unlock many more opportunities for the young people we support, allowing them to make valuable and meaningful contributions.”

Mr Smith also thanked the key partners for seeing the centre to fruition.

“A sincere thank you to the Anglican Schools Commission for providing the land for this project, Buchan Architects for their vision, and Hutchinson Builders for bringing the centre to life,” he said.

“Most importantly, I note this entire project is only made possible with the extraordinary commitment of the Australian Government, with an investment of \$4.5million to establish this world-class facility and the futures of young children and their families in North Brisbane.”



CAPACITY DOUBLES FOR AEIOU Bundaberg

Early intervention for children with autism is now more accessible after the opening of a second classroom at AEIOU Bundaberg.

The centre, which has been providing autism-specific therapy and care in the area since 2012, is proud to now offer access to up to 12 more pre-school aged children.

AEIOU Bundaberg Centre Manager Amanda Rogers said the centre expansion meant families could spend more time receiving crucial early intervention, and less time on the waitlist.

“AEIOU was established in Bundaberg in direct response to parent demand and advocacy,” Ms Rogers said.

“Before opening this service, we were able to offer supports via a partnership with Goodstart Early Learning, but the opening of this centre six years ago was an important development for AEIOU and local families.

“Since that time, we’ve seen a significant rise in demand for our service which provides support from disciplines including occupational, speech and behaviour therapy in addition to early education in a single environment.

“We offer a unique model of support, and it’s a real victory for us and families in the area that we’ve been able to double our capacity and cater to more families.”

Ms Rogers said families who were navigating the process of receiving a diagnosis should get in touch with the centre as a priority to secure their place for 2020.



DECADE MILESTONE FOR COMMITTED *hikers*

For 10 years, AEIOU supporters have been lacing up running shoes and roping in friends, family and colleagues for our signature fundraising event, Take A Hike.

This year, the weather shone for almost 500 participants, young and old, as they once more trekked along Brisbane's iconic river to raise money and all-important awareness.

The event, which was officially kicked off by Brisbane's Lord Mayor Adrian Schrinner and his family, raised an outstanding \$70,000 for the Foundation.

For more information about our 2020 events, visit takeahike.org.au.



True grit

ORDER OF DAY FOR WOMEN'S 300

The weather may have been on their side this time around, however it was still an uphill push for 39 cyclists in the annual Chain Reaction Women's 300.

The tight-knit team managed to raise more than \$400,000 during their 300km ride, which will be shared with the event's beneficiaries.

The funds raised will go directly to the refurbishment and fit-out of AEIOU's Toowoomba centre. This will see the regional centre double capacity and ensure even more children with autism are receiving vital support.



Jurassic Jam V ROCKS THE TRIFFID

For five glorious years, talented Brisbane musicians have picked up their instruments in the name of early intervention, and 2019 was no different.

At its helm are long-term supporters Mary-Jeanne and Scott Hutchinson, along with Mark Waller and Peter Beckman.

A cool \$54,000 was raised from the event, which is organised by the team at The Triffid, with the support of seven local acts.

A sincere thank you to Rick Hopkins, The Hanovers, Jump The Shark, Shag Rock, Roger the Cabin Boy, The Manilows, and The Planktons.

Congratulations must also go to the lucky audience members who walked away with some of the amazing money-can't-buy prizes that were on offer, generously donated by Scott and Mary-Jeanne Hutchinson.



ALEX PERRY DROPS IN ON LOGAN FAMILIES

Australian fashion icon and long-time AEIOU ambassador Alex Perry recently made a very special trip to our Logan centre to connect with staff, children and their families.

Always gracious and empathic, Alex enjoyed speaking to the team about their work, and spent much of his time at eye-level with the children, looking for a way to engage with each child uniquely.

When it was time to turn his attention to the parents and carers for a special afternoon tea in his honour, Alex gifted one lucky family with a two-night stay at his luxury Brisbane hotel, Alex Perry Hotel and Apartments, for some much-needed rest and relaxation.

After 13 years, it's always a pleasure to welcome our friend and avid supporter to Brisbane.

"I've spent the most incredible time with these beautiful children and the work that's done here is nothing short of amazing," he said.

"It's just been a delight, to spend time with the team that works here, watching the way they relate and teach, and just impart love, to these kids is astounding.

"To think AEIOU is coming up to 15 years of service is extraordinary. I have supported AEIOU since the very early days and have always been incredibly proud to be an official ambassador."

SOMETHING ON YOUR *wind?* FREE SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AND STAFF

Workplace wellbeing is one of AEIOU's highest priorities, which is why all our team members have access to emotional support through our Employee Assistance Program (EAP).

Our EAP is delivered by the experienced psychologists at Assure, via phone or email.

Staff can receive up to five sessions for free every year and the service is completely confidential. It's a support base provided to assist people experiencing personal or professional issues such as stress, conflict, relationship concerns or anxiety.

We understand that parenting a child with autism brings its own unique stressors. So we're thrilled to announce that we're now extending this free service to all AEIOU parents and carers (up to three free sessions per year).

Assure's psychologists can help AEIOU parents with anything that may be affecting them - it doesn't have to be connected to a child's autism. Support is available across a wide range of areas, including but not limited to:

- general feelings of anxiety or depression
- feeling overwhelmed by workplace and/or home pressures
- personal issues with partner, friends or family
- family challenges such as divorce, illness or bereavement
- frustration with a lack of career progression
- returning to work after extended leave

Wellbeing coaching is also available to help people develop strategies that boost already productive and effective behaviours.

More information is available at **1800 808 374** or info@assureprograms.com.au.



AEIOU BRINGS PARENT WORKSHOPS INTO THE HOME

In 2019, we launched webinars as an additional format to deliver our Parent Workshop Series to currently enrolled and waitlisted families.

These informative sessions are now being presented to families in a convenient online format, accessible from the comfort of home.

Each month, we cover a different topic, from behaviour to communication, the NDIS and transitioning to school, providing parents with the evidence behind our program, as well as practical tips and strategies to use at home and in the community.

So far, we've welcomed more than 150 parent registrations for our first four sessions, asking valuable questions and receiving real-time advice from members of our expert transdisciplinary team.

Those who are unable to log in at the designated time can also download the presentation at a later date.

We look forward to bringing parents a series of engaging topics in 2020.

AEIOU EMBRACES THE DIGITAL AGE

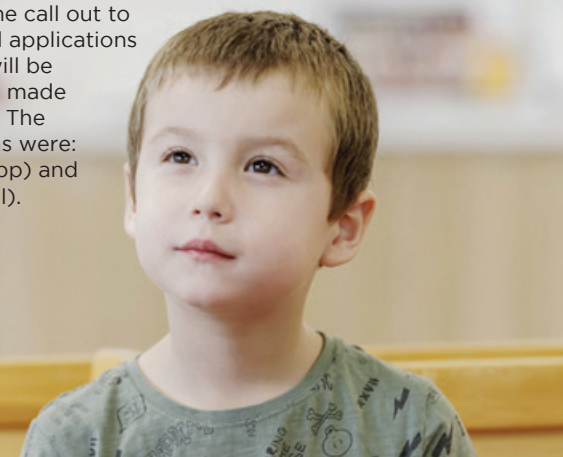
We've been busy this year working on ways to streamline data collection to reduce workloads experienced by staff and help them to make informed clinical decisions, as well as creating a simple access tool for parents.

AEIOU has engaged solutions company Biarri for the digital project, which entered the live User Acceptance Testing (UAT) phase at one of our Brisbane centres towards the end of 2019. A full roll-out is expected in early 2020.

Feedback from staff has been very positive, with the platform considered to be very intuitive and time-efficient for those working directly with children in the classrooms, including the provision of individualised lesson planning.

AEIOU recently put the call out to staff to name the final applications where therapy data will be collected by staff and made accessible to parents. The successful suggestions were: Little Steps (parent app) and aeiou+me (staff portal).

Watch this space for further updates!



Catching up WITH ONE OF AEIOU'S FIRST ALUMNI

Ubaid is tall, and a man of a few words. He's the adored youngest boy of 14 grandchildren and loves horse riding, having ridden for the Equestrian Special Olympics team. His other sporting passions are cricket and rugby league. He's a member of the Brisbane Broncos and a passionate fan, although his anxiety has prevented him from attending home games this year. But there's always next year. And anyway, Ubby is a very happy soul. A go-getter. A high school senior. A budding philanthropist. There's no doubt he's going places. Oh, and did we mention? Ubby has autism.

Ubby was the perfect baby. Then at about 14 months, he started to isolate himself and stopped talking. Being around a large family and numerous cousins, we found this quite odd so started to express our concerns to our GP who thought there might be some sort of speech delay. Eventually, we were referred to a developmental paediatrician and he was diagnosed with autism at two and a half years old in 2004.

Shortly after, Ubby started attending the Acacia Ridge Early Childhood Development Program (ECDP) in a part-time placement. Then one afternoon I was watching Brisbane Extra with Rick Burnett, who featured a segment on AEIOU. I immediately took down the details and contacted them the next day and got Ubby on the waiting list. After a nervous wait, I received an unexpected call to say there was a place available and knew our prayers had been answered.

From five years old, Ubby attended AEIOU's original centre at Moorooka. It was here he thrived. Due to the intensive intervention, he finally gained speech and was toilet trained. The staff were absolutely amazing. These were his biggest development milestones to date and are something I will never forget and always be grateful for. Being at AEIOU was like being part of a family. It was here I got to meet other parents and we became the greatest support network to each other. We still all stay in contact to this day and keep updated on each other's children. We would catch up with the kids at parks, play centres and birthday parties. We had mum nights and dad nights too! It was a truly amazing support network.

It was also at AEIOU we met AEIOU Ambassadors Tim and Judy Sharp and his incredible superhero Laser Beak Man. They are the most amazing people we could have met and Ubby and Tim share a special friendship.

When the time came, AEIOU helped Ubby transition into Prep at the Australian International Islamic College and then again into primary school at Corinda State School. The support we received from the staff throughout this process was very special.

Ubby started equine therapy back in 2012 and at first, was just riding for enjoyment and therapy, however in 2015, he met his new coach, Irina, and she soon recognised his talents and encouraged him and a few other students to join the Special Olympics. This team is another which has become like family - it's beautiful to be part of. Ubby was invited to participate in the State Games in 2017, along with fellow athletes and friends, Daisy, Willow and Carl. It was all about the experience for him, but he amazed us by going on to receive three silver medals! He still continues to ride, with no pressures at all, just taking it as it comes.

Ubby has just completed year 12 at Western Suburbs State Special School. It has been a wonderful setting for him. The staff are lovely and it's an inclusive environment with so much opportunity for post-school life. In 2017 he was nominated as the Green House Vice Captain by his teachers, and his class teacher nominated him for the Lions Children of Courage Award for successfully competing in equestrian events at a high level for a student with special needs. He has gained so much independence and work skills during the past few years. Through work training at school, he was offered supported and paid employment and he now works two days a week while attending school for the remaining three. We are so proud of where he is and how far he has come. It will be heartbreaking to see his schooling life come to an end this year.

This roller coaster ride of autism has certainly humbled me and made me a better person. I'm so grateful for the life experiences Ubby has taught me and the love and innocence he has brought to our family. It comforts me knowing he will be forever innocent.

Looking back on it all, the advice I'd give to a newly diagnosed family is to never give up! Take one day at a time. Some days will be great, some days you'll feel like tearing your hair out, and that will never change, but hang in there because the better days surely make up for them. And try not to be too hard on yourself. Surround yourself with good, supportive people. The people that 'get it'. I promise you that you will all be better for it.

By Yasmeen Shakoor
(Ubby's mum)

"AEIOU was a family. We became the greatest support network to each other and still stay in contact to this day"



STAFF RECOGNISED FOR OUTSTANDING values

At AEIOU, our staff are our heart. Which is why we launched our Staff Reward and Recognition Program in 2019. The awards are split into four categories which align with our key organisational values. We've just announced our third quarterly winners and we couldn't be more proud of the positive example these team members have set.

Support | Bianca Palena, Service Manager - Sippy Downs

Bianca is a supportive, calming influence for her team. She has also been known to roll up her sleeves and decorate the centre, bringing a sense of home away from home for each of the children and their families. At every step she has shown her keen support for all aspects of AEIOU's service, learning how to best support the children, families and her team.

Teamwork | Rebecca Reichow, Room Leader - Camira

As a room leader, Rebecca has been recognised for her magnificent job managing her classroom. She promotes effective teamwork and actively supports each staff member, working hard to ensure she has a great understanding of each of the therapy disciplines, training educators, and taking the time to create additional resources that support the implementation of therapy.

Excellence | Abby Ternullo, Speech Pathologist - Logan

Abby is always willing to go the extra mile, supporting all in the centre. She is a solid support for parents and her team, and is resourceful in developing programs that support each child's learning outcomes. She also takes time to train staff to use systems including PECS, and is known for simply bringing her best self to work every day.

Passion | Sean Redmond, NDIS Transition Support - Central Office

Sean always has the children's best interests at heart and works tirelessly to ensure each child is given the best opportunity to receive a plan and funding that will give them the support they need. When being nominated, Sean was recognised for having a passion for his job that is like no other, with staff across departments who feel privileged to work alongside him.



MAYOR BRINGS CHRISTMAS CHEER TO AEIOU

Once again, The Brisbane Lord Mayor's Charitable Trust kindly provided funding in support of the 2019 Nathan centre Christmas party.

In a repeat performance, there was entertainment galore, with a jumping castle, Ocean Life Aquariums and much more to entertain the children, and adults.

We are very grateful to the Lord Mayor's Charitable Trust for their ongoing support of AEIOU and the children we care for.



Speak WITH OUR NDIS TEAM TODAY

AEIOU is proud to have a dedicated team of NDIS Transition 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 ndis@aeiou.org.au.



OUR SUPPORTERS

Celebrating

15 YEARS OF EARLY INTERVENTION

When AEIOU first opened in 2005, we had a simple yet sincere goal to create brighter futures for children with autism.

Now in 2020, we support more than 250 children across 10 locations each year, helping them develop vital skills to prepare them for school and beyond.

As an organisation, we've grown. Our community has grown. And we look forward to celebrating this milestone with you throughout 2020.

Follow our story on **Facebook**, or visit our website at www.aeiou.org.au.