

eyeson autism

Boosting Opportunities for Children with Autism

It has long been AEIOU Foundation's vision for every child with autism in Australia to have access to evidence-based early intervention, unparalleled in both affordability and quality. In line with this vision, AEIOU Foundation has introduced its revised program of early intervention therapy and education, based on the latest published evidence.

The first phase of a child's life (before age six) is the time when early intervention can develop a child and make a difference to the rest of their lives. There are generations who have not had the benefit of this, and they lead very different lives to what could have been. AEIOU Foundation does not leave the crucial foundation years to chance, we give children and their families the best possible outcomes through intensive early intervention over just a few short years, captured up front.

AEIOU Foundation continues to seek support and commitment from valued philanthropic avenues to ensure we continue to grow, so that more children have access to our life-changing programs.

That dream is also becoming a reality through our national expansion program, which will soon see a new autism-specific centre in Adelaide double the placements available in South Australia.

AEIOU Foundation has been successful in receiving a National Stronger Regions Fund (NSRF) grant from the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development towards the construction of a purpose-built centre in Brighton, Adelaide. Land for the new centre has generously been provided by Minda, a partner not-for-profit organisation supporting South Australians with intellectual disability. With construction expected to begin in the second half of 2016 and completed by early 2017, we are excited more children with autism, and their families, will have access to our program which creates opportunity and optimal lifelong outcomes.



A word from our acting CEO

Kerrie Mahon

As the new Chief Operating Officer and acting Chief Executive Officer, it has been an incredible journey joining AEIOU Foundation. I have thoroughly enjoyed visiting our centres and it is particularly wonderful to see our children fully engaged in the AEIOU program. The commitment of qualified professionals, dedicated parents, and the support of many individuals and organisations is evident.

I also recognise the strategic leadership provided by our Chief Executive Officer Alan Smith over the many years he has dedicated to the AEIOU Foundation. I, alongside our team, wish him a full recovery. Alan is a stalwart at AEIOU and we look forward to his return.

Since arriving at AEIOU in February, I have gained rapid insight into the organisation's unique program and the impact it is having on children with autism, and their families. We are one of the largest full-time early intervention programs in Australia, providing families with an evidence based curriculum which centres on the core features of autism, social communication and behaviours that challenge.

At AEIOU, we believe every child has the right to access therapy and education, the community and society as a whole, and to live life to their best potential. This is the core of what we do. Our intensive and targeted approaches give them the greatest opportunity to develop skills and participate in family and community activities.

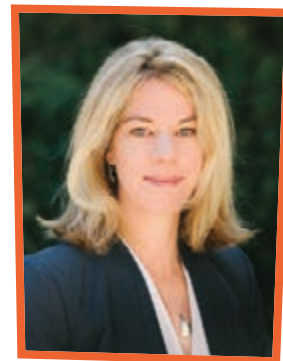
It is very rewarding to read and reflect on the family stories published on our website, social media and within the pages of Eyes on Autism.

Couple that with the support of our families, volunteers, donors and partner organisations, and we really are an organisation that is making a difference.

Best wishes,

Kerrie Mahon

Chief Operating Officer and acting Chief Executive Officer
AEIOU Foundation



AEIOU's unique curriculum features family focussed goals

As leaders in early intervention for children with autism in Australia, AEIOU's team of program coordinators, therapists and teaching staff is continually striving for best practice and measurable outcomes.

In 2014, the Foundation developed and implemented an autism-specific early learning curriculum designed to provide a framework for teaching every child foundational skills necessary to become fully participating members of their communities. The AEIOU curriculum is continually reviewed to align with best practice, with the most recent revision completed in December 2015.

Our curriculum is built on evidence based practices which create a holistic framework for intervention. It aligns with the Good Practice Guidelines (Prior and Roberts, 2012) which recommends curriculums address five basic domains:

- ability to attend to elements of the environment (targeted through the AEIOU curriculum domain of classroom attending skills)
- ability to imitate others (targeted through the AEIOU curriculum domains of imitation and echoics)
- ability to comprehend and use language or alternative communication (targeted through the AEIOU curriculum domains of expressive language skills, receptive language skills, intraverbals and echoics)
- ability to play appropriately with toys (targeted through the AEIOU curriculum domain of play skills)
- ability to engage socially with others (targeted through the AEIOU curriculum domain of social skills)

The AEIOU curriculum also contains other important skills including self-help, academic and visual perception skills.

These all combine to create a framework which provides opportunities to achieve optimal lifelong outcomes.

In setting goals, we work collaboratively with families, taking into consideration data collected through our curriculum assessment, standardised assessments and family priorities.

Our curriculum areas include:

- Classroom Attending - focuses on vital skills such as waiting and turn taking as well as the ability to progress from learning 1:1 to learning within a group, as they will in their next education setting.
- Echoics - focuses on sound imitation, which is critical to language development. The ability to be able to echo spoken words/sounds is a fundamental skill which enables a child to functionally communicate.

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- Visual Perception - focuses on the ability to understand visual information and see patterns, which is important for language development and is a pre-academic skill.
- Social Skills - focuses on teaching children to interact with peers and adults, which improves community access.
- Play Skills - focuses on teaching children how to play, which is a vital skill for social development.
- Expressive Language - focuses on children being able to understand language as a speaker so that they can request items, increase their vocabulary (say the name of items), and comment on their environment.
- Receptive Language - focuses on teaching children to be able to use language as a listener and be able to following instructions.
- Intraverbals focuses on teaching the next stage of expressive and receptive language to further develop communications skills at an advanced level.
- Self-help - focuses on children acquiring adaptive skills needed for independence such as toileting, managing mealtimes, dressing, and hygiene tasks such as tooth brushing and handwashing, going to the dentist/hairdresser.
- Imitation - focuses on children being able to copy what they see which allows them to learn from the natural environment.
- Academic - focuses on acquiring skills useful for school including letters and numbers which introduce them to reading, writing and maths.

Data is collected in all of these areas to show each child's progress or indicate a need to modify strategies. Collaboration between the children's family and the AEIOU team is vitally important to each child's progress and we strongly encourage families to be aware of our curriculum and work with their child's transdisciplinary team at AEIOU to ensure consistency.



Lynn's Lunch celebrates 10 years of helping those in need

Lynn's Lunch was inspired by the powerful story of Lynn Wright and her daughter Louise Morton, co-founder of AEIOU Foundation with her husband Dr James Morton.

Lynn's story is about mothers who support mothers when challenges confront their families. For the Morton family, this was the diagnosis of autism for their son Andy, which ultimately led to the AEIOU Foundation being created. It is the strength of women like Lynn who, as a powerhouse behind the scenes and through their energy and love, give support to their own families to achieve incredible things.

Sadly, Lynn is no longer with the Morton family, however the Lynn Wright Memorial Fund, established in her honour, is a way of continuing her work by providing support to other families who face challenges.

In April this year, the Lynn Wright Memorial Fund hosted the 10th annual Lynn's Lunch event. For many in the AEIOU community, Lynn's Lunch is the one of the highlights of the year, combining some of our favourite activities - enjoying delicious food and beverages, catching up with friends and family and of course, raising money for children with autism at AEIOU.

This year's event at Victoria Park Golf Complex was hosted by Seven News Presenter Sharyn Ghidella and raised a record \$70,000 through ticket sales, donations and raffles.

With up to 40 per cent of families accessing AEIOU's service on an annual income of less than \$38,000, the Lynn Wright Memorial Fund provides an essential service by providing financial assistance and bursaries to those in need.

Since it began in 2006, the Lynn Wright Memorial Fund has raised enough funds through Lynn's Lunch to support more than 160 families, giving children with autism from all backgrounds the opportunity to reach their full potential.



Fashionable fundraising

Visitors to the new Alex Perry Hotel and Apartments in Fortitude Valley are now helping children with autism shine!

Alex Perry, who has been a loyal Ambassador to AEIOU for many years, has generously pledged to donate \$1 to AEIOU for every room booking made.

But wait, there's more! Each Friday, staff at the hotel enjoy a casual dress day and make a gold coin donation to AEIOU. Guests are also able to donate through concierge.

AEIOU is thrilled to receive ongoing support from Alex Perry. The internationally acclaimed fashion designer has made a huge difference to children with autism and we are extremely grateful for his support.



Getting 'NDIS ready'

The NDIS is described as a 'once in a generation change to how disability services and supports will be provided in Australia'. At AEIOU Foundation, one of our major priorities is to ensure our organisation and our families are prepared for this adjustment.

For our organisation, it means we must fully understand how the NDIS is being funded and ensure our service meets key criteria. As part of this process we have been actively engaged in conversation through implementation in Adelaide and as active members on the Queensland Transition Advisory Group. We have also been meeting with key stakeholders in government, including the National Disability Insurance Agency, and will continue to advocate for our organisation and families.

For families, the transition is not a simple process. We are doing our utmost to support them with information and resources that will aid them in understanding the impacts of the NDIS on the future of their children. We are engaging with them in the planning process by conducting training sessions, assisting with review processes and providing up-to-date details on our website and through parent communiques.

We are continuing the process in Adelaide and further developing our strategies with implementation in Townsville. Toowoomba is the next region to focus on, followed successively by Camira, Bundaberg, Logan, Brisbane suburbs and the Gold Coast.

Jurassic Jam 2 – It's Back!

If you love music you won't want to miss this year's Jurassic Jam 2 on Saturday 10 September.

Following the success of the inaugural Jam, Triffid owner Scott Hutchinson and venue Manager John Collins (former bassist from Powderfinger) have agreed to once again unleash the musical talents of some of Brisbane's leading businessmen and women and raise money for AEIOU.

Come along with your friends and enjoy an impressive array of rock and roll covers from the decades of your youth, all the way to the present day all in support of our children at AEIOU.

Tickets are available at:

[http://tickets.oztix.com.au/...](http://tickets.oztix.com.au/)

Book now – don't miss out as it will be a sell out!



Encouraging inclusion

AEIOU Foundation program coordinator Michael Scanlon was delighted to be the keynote speaker at the first national forum for a Special Needs Nipper Programs run by clubs affiliated with Surf Life Saving Australia in May.

Delegates at the event, held at the Noosa Heads Surf Club, came from Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland to discuss strategies and tools to assist children with special needs to participate in nipper programs. There are currently 30 clubs across Australia offering a special needs nipper program and the organisation is planning for growth.

Mike, a senior behavioural therapist, spent time observing the program in action before presenting on autism. He highlighted the importance of building a positive and fun rapport with the children before they step foot on to the beach so that once they do get out into the water, the children are comfortable participating in activities and listening to instructions. He also spoke about always using positive reinforcement to ensure children know they are doing well.

As part of AEIOU Foundation's community engagement program, we are well equipped to partner with organisations to provide information and advice on engaging children with autism. Our team of program coordinators and therapists is available for professional development and public speaking opportunities. Contact central office on (07) 3320 7500 if you would like further information.



Rotary Art Spectacular impresses

The 2016 Brisbane Rotary Art Spectacular, regarded as one of Queensland's most prestigious annual art exhibitions, made AEIOU Foundation its major beneficiary for the third consecutive year.

Hosted by the combined Rotary clubs of Brisbane High-Rise, Hamilton and Stones Corner, this year's event was hosted at the stunning Central Plaza One, in Brisbane's CBD.

Award winning and internationally renowned painter and cartoonist Brett Lethbridge returned in 2016 as curator, once again delivering a first-class, captivating exhibition.

Bankers roll up their sleeves

Our Nathan centre was a hive of activity as six very busy bees from Brisbane Westpac Banking volunteered their valuable time. The bankers from Westpac assisted our team by completing some very important tasks including sorting educational toys, tidying the storage shed, weeding the sensory garden and producing new PECS cards.

A big round of applause to Michael, Nishant, James, Jay, Medina and Kerrie-Anne. Thank you for your enthusiasm and offer to come back again soon!



Taking positive STEPs in professional development

AEIOU Foundation is proud to employ highly-qualified and experienced staff across centres and we are committed to maintaining and improving skills and knowledge through a rigorous professional development program.

The AEIOU staff conference, held every two years, is an opportunity to learn new skills, reinforce previous learnings and share ideas and knowledge. It's also an important component of our staff engagement program.

This year, more than 170 staff gathered at RACV Noosa Resort to participate in workshops and network with colleagues. Included in the program were sessions on the AEIOU Program, teaching strategies, behaviour support strategies, IT tips and tricks, dealing with difficult conversations, and the National Quality Framework.

The event was also the launch of the Foundation's new values STEP – Support, Teamwork, Excellence and Passion, which articulate our company's identity, encourage our conduct and inspire our purpose.



Support



Teamwork



Excellence



Passion

Meet our staff

Rebecca McDowell/ Fundraising and Volunteer Coordinator

How long have you been working in the fundraising team at AEIOU?

I joined AEIOU in November last year.

What did you do before you joined AEIOU Foundation?

Before I joined AEIOU, I was a Fundraising and Event Coordinator at Cystic Fibrosis Queensland.

What is the most rewarding part of your job?

Hearing about the success stories, milestones and graduations of the children is wonderful.

What is an interesting fact about you?

I volunteered in Zimbabwe with HIV patients, orphanages and a special needs class. It was a very humbling experience.

What have you learnt about autism since joining AEIOU?

Since starting at AEIOU, my knowledge of ASD has increased tenfold. The challenges faced on a daily basis by a person living with ASD, and their families is staggering, as is the tireless work of early-intervention therapists and families to equip these children with the skills to succeed in this world. Just incredible.

Name someone who inspires you and why?

Eddie Izzard – for completing 27 marathons in 27 days and raising over \$4,000,000 for Sport Relief. What an absolute champion!



Workplace Partners

At AEIOU, we have many reasons to be grateful every day. The amazing team at BDO Australia recently received an invitation on their screens to support AEIOU as part of the company's Workplace Giving Program, which included dressing down for a gold coin donation.

BDO has also pledged volunteers to support AEIOU's many upcoming fundraising events as well as putting their best foot forward in our signature event, Take A Hike Brisbane.

Thank you so much for your marvellous support and we look forward to creating brighter futures together for children with autism for many years to come.

A big surprise!

Our fabulous supporters, the Brisbane Broncos recently paid a special visit to Kobe Blessington from AEIOU's Bray Park centre.

Kobe's parents Shauna and Kevin were thrilled to welcome Bronco superstars Lachlan Maranta and Corey Oates to their home and the look on little Kobe's face said it all.

The Broncos continue to help raise awareness for autism and our Foundation through our partnership in their Charity Foundation. We are your No1 fans – Let's Go Broncos!



A family story

Jedidiah's story

When our second child Jed turned two, he still wasn't talking or making any sounds. When we saw a paediatrician, he started asking questions about how Jed played and interacted with his toys. Then he used the term 'autism'. I heard him saying the word, but I didn't understand and refused to believe it at first.

In the end, it took two and a half years to get a formal diagnosis. At the time we lived in a mining town in Central Queensland but the week we received the diagnosis, we packed up and moved to Brisbane with the hope of sending Jed to AEIOU Foundation.

In the time we were with AEIOU, we saw so many changes in our son. When he started the program, he couldn't say a word, but after only six weeks, he was forming words, which blew us away. One of the most defining moments was when we were driving in the car and Jed said to me "where are we going Mummy?" I thought to myself, did I really hear that?

Jed also started to learn how to play with toys and developed from a shy, quiet boy into a more social child. We also credit AEIOU with teaching him vital independence skills including washing his hands and focusing on his daily routine.

The wonderful staff at AEIOU have taught us so much about helping Jed and talking to him in a way he will understand. It has made life so much easier and while this experience has been very challenging at times, our family is much stronger for it.

My advice to other parents out there would be to never give up. Our children are far more capable than we sometimes give them credit for. They are amazing so give them a chance to shine. Our Jed is now at big school and his reading level is above all the other children in his class. From where we came from, it's just getting better and better.

By Rachel (Jed's mother)



AEIOU and Victoria Park join forces

AEIOU has forged an exciting partnership with Victoria Park, which sees AEIOU as its charity partner for 2016. The partnership kicked off recently with a Mother's Day brunch attended by hundreds of families celebrating the wonderful women in their lives.

Guests enjoyed a gourmet buffet breakfast and bought hundreds of raffle tickets sold by AEIOU volunteers, hoping to win some of the great prizes provided by our sponsors.

Channel 9 News captured the action for its Mother's Day story and included a glowing report on AEIOU.

We can't wait to take part in more high-quality events hosted by our new partner Victoria Park throughout the next 12 months. Keep an eye out for more details on upcoming events on the AEIOU website and Facebook page.



Toowoomba and Townsville Take A Hike for children at AEIOU

The sixth annual Take A Hike series kicked off in Toowoomba on April 17 followed by Townsville on June 12.

A record number of hikers took to the streets, proving Toowoomba and Townsville's dedication to helping children with autism continues to strengthen year on year.

The Take A Hike heroes donned spectacular pink and blue outfits and showed incredible spirit as they walked and raced through the streets with smiles, cheers and waves.

It was the first time Toowoomba hikers were able to choose from three different distances, 10.5km, 21km and 42km, and with the highest participation we've seen yet, this new event format has been hailed a popular success.

In Townsville, more than 350 soldiers from the Australian Army pounded the pavement alongside the AEIOU community. Collectively our Townsville team hiked over 15,000 kms!

A huge thank you to staff, families, the Australian Army and our corporate supporters for their incredible efforts hiking and fundraising in Toowoomba and Townsville.

The final Take A Hike event for the year will be held in Brisbane on Sunday October 16. We look forward to seeing you all there. Register and donate at www.aeiou.org.au/take-a-hike.



Take A Hike Townsville



Take A Hike Toowoomba

Research Rules at AEIOU

Gold Coast Communication Studies

The communication studies led by Dr David Trembath (Griffith University) at the Gold Coast centre are progressing very well, thanks to all staff, parents, and children involved.

To collect data, the children are wearing small portable voice recorders in the classroom one day each month. These recorders automatically calculate the number of vocalisations each child produces, allowing researchers to track their language development in a new and interesting way.

Data from this new way of measuring language will be compared with traditional standardised speech-language assessments. The findings will help us look at individual differences in how children develop their communication skills while engaged in the AEIOU program, and will provide vital knowledge to inform the way we deliver individualised early intervention in regard to communication.

Longitudinal Study of Australian Students with Autism (LASA)

AEIOU Foundation is participating in the Longitudinal Study of Australian Students with Autism (LASA), which is a long-term study investigating the relationships between child, family, environmental characteristics and educational outcomes.

The project, which started in 2014, is being undertaken by the Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism (Autism CRC), and involves collecting data from families and schools for 6 years, following 272 children, including children from AEIOU. Researchers are looking at change over time, including the critical transition periods between preschool and school (4-5 year cohort) and from primary to high school (9-10 year cohort). In 2016, participating families, centres and staff will complete a short survey.

The LASA project team led by Professor Jacqui Roberts (Griffith University), is working with researchers nationally and are currently preparing the first of a series of papers describing the results.

Families come first

Working with families and carers of children attending AEIOU Foundation is a firm focus of the AEIOU program, recognising that family engagement and inclusion achieves successful outcomes.

To support families and carers attending AEIOU Foundation, and those on our waiting lists, each centre holds a series of regular workshops and parent forum meetings.

Workshops cover popular topics such as mealtimes, transition to further educational settings, reinforcement, independence, social skills and behaviour.

They are presented by our team of qualified professionals and are free to attend.

The Foundation also has an online resource library of recommended reading and videos which are accessed using a personal password.

Many parents enjoy sharing stories, tips and ideas through the parent forums. Held in centre meeting rooms, the forums also provide a platform for families to offer suggestions and feedback on the AEIOU program. Forum representatives are then invited to discuss matters further at meetings with the executive management team and board representatives.



A family story

Olivia's story

As a parent of a child with autism, you always worry if you've made the best decisions for your child at that particular time. My advice to other parents would be, always trust your own judgement and take things at your child's pace - one step at a time.

Our second child Olivia hit all her physical milestones as a baby. The first differences we started to see were around her second birthday. She never answered to her name, did not acknowledge people around her and showed no interest in other children. She wasn't talking and seemed to be in a little world of her own, albeit a happy one.

We had an inkling it was autism as her signs seemed to be consistent with all the red flags from our research. We discussed our concerns with our local doctor and over the following months, regularly worked with an occupational therapist, speech therapist and child psychologist while waiting for our paediatrician appointment. We felt a sense of relief when we received Olivia's formal diagnosis. Now we could get her the early intervention we knew was so important.

Shortly before Olivia was 3 ½ years, we were offered a position with AEIOU. Initially we were nervous as she had not spent more than a couple of hours away

from us and suffered from separation anxiety. Our fears were quickly allayed as we saw first-hand how experienced the staff were and the strong bond they formed with our daughter from day one.

When Olivia started at AEIOU she hardly answered to her name, was not talking or toilet trained and delayed in her fine motor skills. Now she is talking in phrases and has stopped using her PECS book as can make requests using her words. She is toilet trained and is developing fine motor skills. She also loves to dance and is currently participating in dance classes through our AEIOU centre. I've always said she'll be on stage when she's older as she loves to perform.

The change to our family has been amazing. Olivia now wants to play with her sister and brother rather than by herself and can communicate to us her wants and needs. Outings with Olivia are a lot more enjoyable as her behaviour is now so much more manageable, thanks to strategies given by the AEIOU staff.

During centre Christmas celebrations last year, Olivia was photographed sitting on Santa's knee with a look of sheer happiness on her face. Before AEIOU, the very sight of Santa would send her screaming. It was such a special moment for us.

We are filled with hope when we think about Olivia's transition to school in the coming years. We are comforted by the fact she has been given the tools to help her form friendships and enjoy learning.

My words of hope to other families would be, 'where there's a will, there's a way'. A child who is loved, encouraged and praised will always succeed in their own way. Receiving this diagnosis is certainly not the end of the world, it's the avenue to continue your journey forward.

By Kellie (Olivia's mother)



Queensland's Corporate Crusaders don their capes for AEIOU

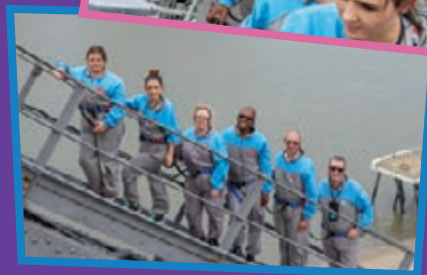
It was a superhero spectacle on April 15 when AEIOU held its inaugural Great Corporate Capers.

A number of top Queensland business leaders took part, revealing their superhero alter egos while facing a number of challenges around Brisbane's CBD.

Spiderman, who looked a lot like Ipswich Mayor Paul Pisasale, was seen tumbling across St Laurence's College oval inside a zorb ball. Batman, who closely resembled Lacey Lane owner Bec Bowling, was spotted climbing the Story Bridge. The Green Lantern, who was the spitting image of Peter Fenton, Bartercard's South East Queensland General Manager, was witnessed making a hasty exit from West End's Escape Room.

Other superheroes included AEIOU Chairman and Founder James Morton AM, Conrad Gargett Managing Director Bruce Wolfe, Lacey Lane Co-owner Nikki Bowling, Samies Girl Seafood Owner and local marine environmentalist Kristina Georges, and AEIOU Philanthropy Manager Vin Naidoo.

It was an exhilarating day full of fun challenges, and it also gave our corporate crusaders the chance to consider the immense challenges children with autism and their families face every day. The superheroes raised vital funds for AEIOU and helped spread the word about the life-changing outcomes being achieved through our early intervention program.



A wheely big challenge for a great cause

Seven long days riding 1000km up and down the steep hills around Adelaide was the challenge 42 cyclists took on for this year's Chain Reaction Queensland Challenge in support of AEIOU and Starlight Children's Foundation.

The sheer determination was evident on the faces of the riders as they tackled the testing hills of Adelaide and surrounds, including the infamous Corkscrew Road climb and iconic Willunga Hill, which feature in the Tour Down Under. It was an extreme physical challenge but cyclists admitted it was nothing compared with the daily struggles faced by children with autism and their families.

AEIOU was on hand during the event, providing logistical and moral support, and we were impressed with the camaraderie, encouragement and team spirit among the riders.

AEIOU is incredibly grateful to be the charity beneficiary of Chain Reaction for the third time. Congratulations and thank you to organisers as well as the courageous and determined riders for their monumental achievements. Not only did they tackle an enormous physical challenge, they raised vital funds for AEIOU that will allow us to continue to positively change the lives of children with autism.

Celebrating a decade of support

We'd like to turn back the clock to December 2015 and share some memories from AEIOU's Thank You event for major donors and supporters.

Mary-Jeanne and Scott Hutchinson helped make the event a very special occasion by providing a beautiful riverside venue, food and beverages.

AEIOU acknowledged the invaluable support provided by generous businesses, organisations and individuals that has allowed us to continue providing life-changing early intervention to children with autism, positively changing their lives forever.

The celebration marked the end of a very special year for AEIOU. 2015 was our 10th anniversary, and provided us with the opportunity to reflect on a 'Decade of Difference'.

Many of our major donors and supporters have been with us throughout the entire 10-year journey since our humble beginnings back in 2005. We look forward to another 10 wonderful years helping children with autism have a brighter future with help from our amazing supporters!



A family story

Sam's story

Sam's development for his first 18 months was similar to his two older siblings, however we soon became concerned his speech development and motor skills were not progressing at the same rate. Added to this were rigid behaviours and social stress, often highlighted by tantrums or running away when family came to visit.

Many people suggested it was probably just Sam being a boy and developing at little more slowly. We began working with a speech pathologist assuming it could be merely a speech delay which could remedy itself over time. However, the progress was tedious and we soon started looking at other options.

At 2 ½, we took Sam for an initial visit with a paediatrician but were met with a very clinical approach and no clear advice. A few months later we saw a developmental paediatrician who quickly provided us with an ASD diagnosis. Although it was something we had suspected, the words thrust us into a state of what can only be called grief.

The path ahead was confusing and confronting with no clear direction. Overwhelmingly, our research highlighted AEIOU was the best path for us to travel down and so we enrolled.

Sam started a few months later. In the early days, Sam lacked the basic skills like toileting, grooming and dressing and shied from social interaction with children or adults. He also suffered from separation anxiety which made every

drop-off extremely difficult. His speech was limited to less than 10 words and he struggled to follow the simple instructions.

Without doubt, our first and still our most lasting impression of AEIOU has been the teachers, therapists and learning facilitators whose dedication, persistence and words of hope were a pillar of strength in some very trying times. They have also gifted us with great tools and strategies which we continue to use in everyday life.

Simple things like independently toileting were achieved in a matter of weeks, something we had been working on for months. Sam's ability to communicate more effectively was achieved and this led to a reduction of meltdowns. We put PECS to use actively in the first year which allowed us to provide routine and clear instructions for Sam.

Importantly, Sam became excited to come to AEIOU and started forming friendships. Today we see a loveable little boy who now seeks social interaction rather than solitude.

Sam has now successfully transitioned to mainstream school and although we still have challenges ahead, AEIOU has allowed us to break shackles we thought would be in place forever and given us confidence to deal with the future. Every child has the potential to contribute to society in a way that meets their ability and with AEIOU, we found a key that unleashed this potential in ways which seemed impossible.



To other families who find themselves walking a similar path, we'd encourage you to talk about your child's autism diagnosis with someone. We all cope differently, but it is important for your child's wellbeing and your own state of mind to communicate these feelings effectively so ultimately you can share the ups and downs of the journey together.

By Paul and Mary (Sam's parents)

Calendar of events

Wizard Mode Australian Private Screening – 2 August, New Farm.

WANTZ Annual Gala Dinner – 26 August, Brisbane.

50/50 Draw Broncos vs Roosters – September 1. Volunteers wanted – email: volunteers@aeiou.org.au.

The Great Southern Crossing – 1-28 September, virtual event.

Jurassic Jam 2 – 10 September, The Triffid, Newstead.

Take A Hike Brisbane – 16 October, Brisbane.

Melbourne Cup events (various) – November 1, details on our Events page soon.

'Escape' benefits children with autism

Local Gold Coast artists Kerrie Doolan, Colleen McMahon, Jake Latimer and Melissa Latimer banded together to exhibit their masterpieces at the Robina Community Art Gallery and help raise awareness for AEIOU. With a percentage of sales being donated to AEIOU we are eternally grateful for their support and for sharing their creativity and generosity.





TAKE A HIKE!

Walk. Run. Race.

BRISBANE | SUNDAY OCTOBER 16

www.aeiou.org.au/take-a-hike

Take A Hike Brisbane Bigger and better than ever!



Walk. Run. Race.

• 10.5km • 21km • 42km



Dust off those trainers, gather your team, start taking the stairs, and prepare to get your feet on the street to support children with autism.

Let's work together to change lives!

Call 07 3212 1110 or E: karen.descovich@aeiou.org.au
Register today and start your fundraising www.aeiou.org.au/take-a-hike

