

3 months on ...

Well... to say that it has been busy over the last three months is an understatement and we can't believe that we are now 3 months old !!!!

We thought it would be a great idea to celebrate the fact that we survived these first three months by sending you an update on our achievements and plans for the future of the Autism Advisor program in Tasmania. We have also invited other services funded through the Helping Children With Autism Federal Government funding to provide you with news about their current services in Tasmania.

Firstly, a very big THANKYOU to the Autism Tasmania implementation team headed up by Mick and Rose Clark for their volunteered time and effort to set up the program before we came on board in January/February of this year.

Since coming on board we have set up offices in both Launceston and Hobart. We have also acquired an additional 12 hours of administrative support over the last 2 months which has helped us set up some of our primary administrative and office requirements. We have spent a great deal of time learning about the various components of the Helping Children with Autism package including the application processes for funding and the "ins and outs" of the new Medicare rebates. We have met with key stakeholders including the early intervention panel service providers and state government service providers. In all we have taken more than 300 enquiries and assisted over 100 families in accessing funding and/or other services. We understand



The **Autism Advisor Team** - Autism Tasmania Inc.

From Left to Right:

Anita Killick (Autism Advisor - Hobart Office), Karen Mason (Autism Advisor Team Leader - Launceston Office), Sam Hooper (Autism Advisor - Hobart Office)

that it has taken some time to respond to family needs and that at times the information we have provided has not always been as accurate as we would have liked—however we hope that our program will improve with time, experience and access to appropriate resources.

Our primary goal is to improve our response to family needs, including reducing waiting times and increasing access to appropriate information sources and we believe we are moving towards achieving this goal as we consolidate what we have learned, become familiar with our roles and establish administrative and computer systems that will support efficient and effective service provision.

Thank you for all your support and patience and we look forward to ongoing working partnerships with you all in the future.

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Evaluation of the Autism Advisor Program in Tasmania

There have been discussions with FaHCSIA regarding future plans for the Autism Advisor Program. We as a team have many ideas, however we are also mindful that so far this program has grown and developed through our partnerships with families. We would therefore really appreciate feedback on your experiences with the program. In particular we would appreciate constructive recommendations for focus areas of improvement. With this update we have included a feedback sheet.

Please take the time to complete this form and return to the Autism Advisor Team by email:

autismnorth@autismtas.org.au

or post to:

Autism Advisor Program

Autism Tasmania, Inc.

PO Box 1552

Launceston 7250

Helping Children with Autism [HCWA]

The Australian Government has committed \$190 million for the four years up to June 2012 to deliver the Helping Children with Autism package. The package will help address the need for support and services for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). All initiatives include support for parents, families, carers and children from diverse cultural, linguistic and Indigenous backgrounds and those living in rural and remote areas.

What does the package include? The package includes:

- **Autism Advisors**
- Funding for **early intervention services**
- **PlayConnect Playgroups**
- **Early Days family workshops**
- An **ASD website**

For further information visit www.fahcsia.gov.au/autism or email asd@fahcsia.gov.au



Autism Spectrum Disorder Website

The Raising Children Network ASD website provides information, online resources and interactive functions to support parents, families, carers and professionals.

The ASD website was launched by the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, Bill Shorten in February 2009.

Visit the website on: www.raisingchildren.net.au/autism

EARLY DAYS Workshops

What is Early Days?

Early Days provides free workshops for mothers, fathers and other family carers of children aged six years and under who have or may have an autism spectrum disorder. Early Days is part of the Australian Government's Helping Children with Autism package.

How does Early Days help families?

Early Days workshops provide up-to-date information about autism and parenting tools to promote the development of children with autism. Parents and carers also get the opportunity to meet other parents and share ideas and experiences.

What does Early Days offer? - *Early Days Workshops*

An Early Days workshop runs over one full day. It is intended for mothers, fathers and other family carers of children who have recently been diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder or who are starting the assessment and diagnosis process.

Workshops are kept to small groups of 4-10 people. Families will gain information to help them in the early days of their journey, including:

- learning about autism spectrum disorder and what it means for their child and family
- learning how the everyday things they do can make a difference to their child's development
- learning how to choose between therapies and get the most out of services.

Early Days workshops will be held in city, regional and rural centres across Australia, whenever and wherever there is enough interest.

How do parents and family carers register their interest?

Website: www.earlydays.net.au

Early Days free call: 1800 334 155

Enquiries: Phone Carole at Lady Gowrie Tasmania (03)62306892

PLAYCONNECT Playgroups

"PlayConnect" Playgroups are designed to help families with children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Sessions are initially run by a Development Worker, for between 6-24 months, until they are able to transition to become community, parent-run playgroups. Numerous studies have shown the value of playgroup on young children's social, cognitive, emotional and language development. Parents and caregivers say playgroups are useful because they help them connect with other families in similar situations.

"PlayConnect" is not therapy based however the "PlayConnect" Development Worker can provide families with information about strategies for play and specialist services in their local area. Families can also contact the Playgroup Australia's ASD Advisor for advice about children with ASD on 1800 790 335.

In Tasmania there is currently one "PlayConnect" playgroup established. It is being run in Devonport at 51 Steele Street in a secure venue which is an annex of the Early Childhood Intervention Centre. With a specially designed program aimed at individual needs of children attending, it is also an opportunity for parents/carers to get together and talk about their day to day experiences. The "PlayConnect" Playgroup is a place where support, advice on available relevant services, and an opportunity to connect with other families in the area is available. Funded by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, it is a part of the "PlayConnect" Playgroups and run by Playgroup Tasmania. There is no cost to families and siblings aged 0-6 years are also welcome to attend.

If families are keen for a "PlayConnect" Playgroup in their area they are encouraged to register interest by contacting their Playgroup Association on **1800 171 882** (Toll Free) or by visiting the website:

www.playconnect.com.au

Positive Partnership Workshops in Tasmania

Since October 2008 Tasmanian families have been offered three Positive Partnership Workshops across the state.

Two in Hobart (November 2008 & May 2009); one in Launceston (March 2009) and one in Devonport (April 2009).

The Positive Partnerships website - www.autismtraining.com.au contains information of dates and locations or contact Kate Wilson on 0417 372 652 or 62 311625 or email on kate.wilson1@education.tas.gov.au



The PANEL

The Early Intervention Service Provider Panel in Tasmania currently consists of the following services:

Giant Steps

37 West Church St
Deloraine

03 6362 2522

ISADD

0418 580 491

SPOT ON

03 6234 5717

TLC

03 6267 2744

Families in Tasmania who have access to the early intervention funding are also able to access early intervention services from any panel service provider in any state of Australia.

Funding for Autism Early Intervention Services

The early intervention funding under the *Helping Children with Autism (HCWA)* package is aimed at providing increased access to a range of early intervention services including one-on-one intensive activities and tailored group and individual programs that can be delivered in a range of settings. The funding supports the delivery of multidisciplinary evidence based early intervention to facilitate improved cognitive, emotional and social development prior to a child starting school.

The eligibility criteria for children accessing the early intervention funding through the *HCWA* package is as follows:

- All eligible children up to their sixth birthday will have access to the early intervention funding of up to \$12,000 (up to \$6,000 per financial year) regardless of whether or not they have commenced school.
- From the child's sixth birthday until their seventh birthday, special consideration may be given which would allow continued access to the funding. This will be determined by an Autism Advisor on a case-by-case basis using nationally consistent criteria.
- Once a child turns seven years of age they are no longer eligible to access funding under the early intervention component of the package.

Families can use this funding to choose the early intervention services that best suit their child from an **Early Intervention Service Provider Panel**. Eligible early intervention services under the package have a multidisciplinary and evidence based focus. A percentage (35%) of the funding may be used to purchase equipment and/or resources that are recommended by the early intervention service as something that will contribute to the intervention process.

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Update from Panel Service Providers

Update from Giant Steps

The First Steps group has commenced. A visiting service for Speech Pathology and Occupational Therapy is also now available in some circumstances.

Update from ISADD

ISADD is already providing early intervention services to several families in Hobart. They are also getting many enquiries from families in the north of the island, and are investigating the feasibility of providing a service there.

They will be able to provide services to clients in the north of the state if they can get a minimum of 3 families/clients in one area.

Update from SPOTON

"The Spot On service continues to provide coordinated services in Speech Pathology, Occupational Therapy, Psychology and Educational Consultancy. You may have heard that Alison Hopwood of Independent Kids Occupational Therapy has welcomed her new son, Will, into the world. Both mum and babe are doing well and Alison is finding that she is once again able to consult, do new assessments, and work with children and families. You may also have heard that Sherry Edwards of Kidslearn Education Consultancy has not been able to consult as much as she would like due to unforeseen circumstances. Her experienced staff has been able to continue to support some children and families while plans to continue to be able to develop the service are being made. Sari O Meagher, psychologist, will be overseas from mid-July to mid-Sept but still has some appointments available before she leaves Tasmania; so if any parents may be thinking about getting a thorough, up-to-date evaluation of their child's development/behaviour they may wish to make a booking with Sari before mid-July. Speech Pathology Tasmania's staff is continuing to work directly and consultatively with families in a range of locations around Hobart and Tasmania."

Update from TLC

"**TLC Psychology** is currently expanding its services and now provides combined and separate **Psychology** and **Occupational Therapy (OT)** services throughout **all regions of Tasmania**. We have clinics in Howden and Bellerive and will be opening clinics in the North/North West in the near future. We currently offer home/childcare visits throughout the state. Services offered include one-on-one sessions and groups sessions for children and/or parents as well as any necessary assessment for these services.

OT and combined psychology/OT sessions are currently being offered in Hobart on 13th-14th of June 2009

Regular OT and combined OT/Psychology sessions will commence throughout Tasmania from July 2009 and Psychology sessions will be extended to the North/North West. We recommend that families requiring these services contact us ASAP as places are filling fast.

Contact: **Mickaela Schelleman**

Phone: (03) 6267 2744

Mobile: 0410 788 844

E-mail: mickaela@tlcpsychology.com.au

TLC Psychology is in the process of expanding to offer **Speech Pathology** services throughout the state. This will enable us to provide an affordable fully multidisciplinary service to all clients. Please contact us for more information or check our website for updates: www.tlcpyschology.com.au

Speech Pathology services are currently available in Hobart through the TLC Psychology consortium."

Funding for Autism Early Intervention Services (Continued)

Families will be advised of how much funding they have spent via a **monthly Family Activity Statement**. This is sent to the family via email at the start of each month and outlines the amount of funds that were used for the previous month; the total cost of services delivered in that month and the balance of the Early Intervention funding remaining.

If a family has not accessed any services in the previous month they will not receive a Family Activity Statement. If a family does not have an email address the Family Activity Statement will be mailed to them in hard copy.

If you have not received a Family Activity Statement when you think you should have, please contact an Autism Advisor to verify that we have your current contact details.

More about the

Autism Advisor Service - Autism Tasmania, Inc

The Autism Advisor Service is one component of the Helping Children with Autism package and is being delivered in each state and territory by their Autism Association. Autism Tasmania, Inc. has received the Australian Government funding and is therefore responsible for establishing the Autism Advisor Service in Tasmania.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a lifelong developmental disorder that affects 1 in every 160 Australians. It can be overwhelming for families to learn that their child may have an Autism Spectrum Disorder and for them to begin the process of understanding the impact this may have and how to identify and access services that will most meet their child and family needs. The Autism Advisor Service is a new service in Tasmania established to provide advice and information to families throughout this journey.

Autism Advisors will

Assist families to understand the assessment and diagnostic process, the diagnosis and recommendations prepared by the diagnostic team.

Provide families with practical information and advice about living with and caring for a child with a diagnosis of ASD.

Gather and maintain up to date information about the range of services and benefits that are available to families of children with ASD. These will include services that are funded by the Australian Government, including the Helping Children with Autism initiatives, State Government and local community service networks.

Provide impartial, evidence based information and links to service options related to

- The various types of interventions that have produced positive outcomes for children with ASD.
- Local early intervention programs and services available including costs and waiting periods
- Local educational and support services including information workshops, local playgroups and/or support groups.
- The various resources and benefits available to families including the HCWA funding available to access specific early intervention services.

Assist eligible families to access the Australian Government's funding package for early intervention services and support families from rural and remote areas apply for an outer rural and remote payment.

Families and service providers are encouraged to contact us for more information about the Autism Advisor Program and the HCWA package.

The **Autism Advisor Service** is a central point of contact for families.

Family Support Coordinator

The Autism Advisors work closely with Rose Clark - Family Support Coordinator for Autism Tasmania.

Rose is employed by Autism Tasmania part-time. Her role is to provide information and support, to act as an advocate for individuals with an Autism Spectrum Disorder and/or their families and to develop and provide training, and resources throughout the state.

Contact: **Rose Clark**
Ph/Fax: **6423 2288**
or **0407 320 048**
Email: autism@autismtas.org.au

Hobart

Autism Advisor (South)

2 / 221 Macquarie St, Hobart

PO Box 313, South Hobart, Tas, 7004

Email: autismsouth@autismtas.org.au

Phone: (03) 6224 9070

Devonport

Family Support Co-ordinator

4 Hiller Street,

Devonport, Tas, 7310

Email: autism@autismtas.org.au

Phone: (03) 6423 2288

Launceston

Autism Advisor (North)

59D Amy Road, Launceston

PO Box 1552, Launceston, Tas, 7250

Email: autismnorth@autismtas.org.au

Phone: (03) 6344 1212