



The Olga Tennison Autism
Research Centre

Annual Report 2012- 2013



Contents

Introduction	3
Objective 1 — Facilitate large and ongoing projects	4
Publications	8
Conference presentations	11
Grants	15
Objective 2 — Facilitate collaboration with other research centres both nationally and internationally	
Collaborations	17
Visitors	19
OTARC Staff visiting other researchers	22
Objective 3 — Foster and support a National Research Network investigating the cause and management of ASD	
Cooperative Research Centre for Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders	23
The Australasian Society for Autism Research (ASfAR)	23
Objective 4 — Conduct campaigns to improve the public profile of autism research, thereby attracting additional research funds via grants and donations.	
Ask a Researcher and Media Activity	24
Donations	26
Objective 5 — Provide opportunities for student based research and mentoring programs	
Current Postgraduate students	27
2012—2013 Postgraduate and Honours completions	28
Objective 6 — Foster knowledge transfer to practitioners within the field	
Online Resource for Tertiary Students with ASD, their parents and staff	30
ADOS Training	30
DSM-5 Forum and Webinar	31
2013 OTARC Research Forum	31
The OTARC Blog	31
Talks and Workshops	32
Other Initiatives	
Global Knowledge Transfer	34
The Early Assessment Clinic	34
The Margot Prior Wing (ASLECC)	34
Raising Children Network	35
World Autism Awareness Day, 2013	35
Other Appointments	35
OTARC Operations & Projects	37
OTARC LAB Operations Project	38
Financial Report	39
Staffing and Centre Personnel	40
Advisory Committee	41

ANNUAL REPORT 2012-2013

Introduction

At the completion of our fifth year of operation, it is with much satisfaction that I look back on all that has been achieved to date at the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre. Of course, none of this would have been possible without Mrs Olga Tennison whose generosity continues to support all that we do. We are extremely grateful to her, and inspired by her absolute graciousness.

Our work has become increasingly global over the past year, with dissemination of our research findings and trainings to facilitate evidence-based practice in Japan, China and Bangladesh. This is in addition to work already underway in Poland and South Korea. The Centre also continues to attract visitors from overseas who are keen to promote research and practice in ASD in their own countries, such as Vietnam, India, and Oman. Engagement in non Western countries is increasingly important when one considers that research on ASD is focused on only 10% of the world population! And due to language barriers, these findings are not accessible to the majority of the world.

A highlight this year was the announcement that the Co-operative Research Centre for “Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders” was funded. This outcome will surely change the landscape of autism research and practice in Australia. The first AGM was held in Brisbane on July 29th. As an Essential Partner in this 8-year program, we are already planning on how best to deliver the outcomes promised in this exciting and innovative venture.

The improvements to our website, to processes for communication, and to our lab operations has meant much greater efficiencies in our research and improved support for our researchers. In addition we are now able to communicate our research finding more efficiently via digital media to our stakeholders. Moreover, we held two very well attended forums over the last year: one designed to address the changes to diagnostic criteria in DSM-5 (released May 2013), attended by over 400 people, and the other to communicate our research findings to our participants, attended by approximately 200. These events serve to inform the community of our work, and I take great pleasure at how well received the work of our more established as well as our junior researchers and students is received. Of course this work is also published in scholarly journals, allowing for dissemination nationally and internationally.

In conclusion, I would like to acknowledge the dedication and creativity of our staff, students and volunteers who have each contributed to our achievements over the past year. We outline these achievements and activities in this report for the period of August 2012 to July 2013.



*Professor Cheryl Dissanayake,
PhD MAPS
Director, Olga Tennison Autism
Research Centre*

Our Objectives and Achievements

Objective 1

Facilitate large and/or ongoing research projects

Our list of publications below indicates we continue to be productive in our research efforts. The current 'Research Themes and Projects' at OTARC are outlined below, with details of some specific studies provided to illustrate our work over the last year. The projects underway at the Centre continue to grow our reputation both nationally and internationally with our achievements realized in high impact journal publications, conference presentations, invited addresses and grants.

New opportunities are also derived from the formation of Research Focus Areas (RFA) at La Trobe University. OTARC researchers have joined two RFAs: the 'Understanding Disease' and 'Building Healthy Communities' RFAs. A new research project is already underway within the former entitled "Investigating the Genetics of Comorbid Anxiety and Insomnia in Autism Spectrum Disorder".

Last, but not least, the opening of the Co-operative Research Centre for Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders (outlined under Objective 2) will serve to increase the number of large collaborative research projects at OTARC, and extend our reach.

1. Identification and diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders

a. Identifying early behavioural signs of Autism Spectrum Disorders in infancy and toddlerhood

We continue to build on the Social Attention and Communication Surveillance (SACS) project to prospectively identify autism in infancy and toddlerhood. Over the past year, in addition to increasing our international implementation of this research, Dr Josephine Barbaro has revised the SACS (SACS-Revised) to further refine the ability of community-based professionals to identify ASDs with greater accuracy. This approach has been incorporated within the Autism CRC, and will, in

addition to Victoria, be implemented in sites in WA, NSW, and QLD.

b. Identifying biological markers of Autism Spectrum Disorders

Together with Dr Jordy Kaufman, from Swinburne University, Dr Kristelle Hudry and Professor Cheryl Dissanayake continue to explore early brain and behavioural development of infant siblings of children with autism in a longitudinal study to determine features of the early autism phenotype and pathways towards and away from ASD outcome. The first infants turn 3 years in 2013, and those who have developed an ASD are now confidently identified, with rates comparable with those reported internationally. The early characteristics can now be linked to their confirmed diagnosis.


2. Behavioural and cognitive development and differences

The work in this area is focussed on developmental differences between children with an ASD and typically developing children, as well as differences between boys and girls with an ASD. The ultimate aims are always to find more effective ways of supporting the children and their families to promote better outcomes.

a. Comparative studies of Autism and Asperger's Disorders and gender differences in Autism Spectrum Disorders

Three complementary follow-up studies, by PhD candidate Rucha Joshi, investigated gender differences in children later diagnosed with ASD. The project utilised data from the Social Attention and Communication Study (SACS; Barbaro & Dissanayake, 2010), with the aims of identifying gender differences in a) the early indicators of autism during the first two years of life, b) early

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cognitive development and autism manifestations and c) the development of social attention and restricted and repetitive behaviours (RRBs) from 2- to 4-years of age. The combined results indicated that in those early years of life the developmental trajectory is similar in boys and girls, except that boys showed slightly more RRBs than girls.

b. Understanding and interacting with the social world

A new study led by Dr Giacomo Vivanti explored why Intellectual Disability occurs so often in children with an ASD. The results from two independent samples of children indicated that severity of ASD in early development is related to lower IQ one and two years later. We propose that more severe autism symptoms limit children's access to social learning experiences thereby leading to poorer intellectual development and hence lower IQ. It is therefore crucial to find ways to socially engage children with severe ASD symptoms in order to foster more positive developmental outcomes. This work, now published, has recently gained much international attention.

A number of studies conducted by Heather Nuske for her PhD research program have investigated whether preschool children with an ASD react differently to emotions expressed by familiar and unfamiliar people. Using pupillary response (as measured by the Tobii eye-tracker) to assess reaction to facial expressions of fear, Heather found that the magnitude of the responses of children with an ASD was similar to that of typically developing children when fear was expressed by a familiar face, but was reduced when they saw an unfamiliar fear-face. However, the children with ASD showed a delay in their response to both familiar and unfamiliar faces. These differences in responses to emotions expressed by others may contribute to the communication and social-reciprocity difficulties in children with an ASD.

In two separate studies Dr Kristelle Hudry observed children with an ASD in social interaction with their parents (with Honours student Megan Grant) and with their peers (with Dr David Trembath and Honours student Katrine Gunn). They found that, in comparison with parents of typically developing children, parents of young children with an ASD tended to interact in ways which were more directive, and the children themselves made fewer active contributions than typical toddlers. This has the potential to delay child learning and indicates that parents may need to be supported to develop interaction styles that promote joint attention and intentional communication skills of their young children with an ASD. In the second study, more peer interaction were found in semi-structured and structured activities than during free play, suggesting that adult mediation may be important to encourage social interaction between children with an ASD and their peers.

3. Related Conditions

a. Sleep difficulties

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale, together with students and colleagues, is involved in a variety of studies on sleep difficulties and anxiety associated with ASD. She recently completed a pilot survey on the effect of bedding and diet on sleep in young children with and without an ASD. As expected, sleep problems were more common in children with an ASD. Diet was not associated with sleep quality, but room temperature and the type of bedding cover used was, with synthetic covers and extreme temperatures associated with poorer sleep quality in both groups. The survey was funded by the Australian Wool Innovation, and a larger study is currently being designed to confirm and extend these preliminary findings.

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An analysis of data from two large data bases held at the University of Western Australia (UWA; the Raine data base and the West Australian Autism Biological Registry) is expected to throw more light on a range of other developmental and medical factors that may relate to poor sleep, and whether there is a longitudinal relationship between sleep, anxiety and symptoms of ASD (with Professor Andrew Whitehouse from UWA, and Honours students). In another collaborative study, Associate Professor Richdale (with Professor Beth Malow and Dr Blythe Corbett from Vanderbilt University and Dr Margaret Souders from the Children's Hospital, Philadelphia) is investigating factors associated with sleep problems and anxiety in primary school-aged children with high-functioning ASD in Australia and the USA.

With her PhD student Emma Baker, Associate Professor Richdale is also examining the links between sleep, hormones and psychopathology with a specific emphasis on whether circadian rhythm disturbances contribute to sleep disturbances in adults with an ASD.

b. Mental health and wellbeing

Mental health issues and emotional wellbeing in toddlers at high-risk for ASDs, based on having an older sibling with this diagnosis, is being investigated in a longitudinal study by Doctoral student Kat Crea. This is the first study to monitor these factors longitudinally in children from 2 years of age growing up in families where there is ASD.

4. Language and communication

a. Language processing and the effectiveness of communication supports

Much of the work in this area has concentrated on the evaluation of support and intervention strategies to foster language and communication in children and adults with an ASD. Dr David Trembath has been coordinating this work in

close collaboration with his students and various colleagues from OTARC and Speech Pathology. Dr Trembath has investigated :

- the effect of various factors on evidence-based Speech Pathology practice;
- the effectiveness of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) supports for adults with ASD;
- the effectiveness of various interventions, including AAC, on language development in children with ASD;
- the relationship between adaptive behaviour and reading ability in children with ASD;
- parents' expectations, awareness and experiences of accessing evidence-based Speech Pathology services;
- visual attention of children with ASD to AAC instructions.


An exciting new line of research was started this year by Dr Kristelle Hudry together with Dr Josephine Barbaro and their Doctoral students, Lisa Rumney, Nicole Porter and Rebecca Kam. They are investigating the impact of being raised in a bilingual family environment upon the language, social, and cognitive abilities of children with an ASD. The findings from this research program will contribute to what is becoming a new hot topic in the field of Autism research – ASD outside of the context of Western/English-speaking countries.

5. Focus on families

a. Family adaptation to living with Autism Spectrum Disorder

b. Families as partners in service delivery

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake and Doctoral student Rebecca McStay are currently investigating how families adapt to a child with an
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ASD over the long-term. The aim is to understand the changes in family adaptation across the important developmental period of children from 3 to 16 years of age, and what predicts family adaptation at each stage in an effort to determine how best to intervene at each stage to promote family adaptation.

6. Interventions across the lifespan

- a. Supporting evidence-based practice
- b. Effectiveness of early intervention
- c. Predictors of intervention outcomes

We continue to conduct studies with the pre-school children with an ASD at the Victorian Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre: Margot Prior Wing (MPW). Among these are projects aimed at charting how best to predict gains in intervention so that early treatment approaches may be individualized to the unique learning profile of each child. Also central to the research program at the MPW is the clinical evaluation of the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) being implemented within a group-based setting. This work is coordinated by Dr Giacomo Vivanti. Several of these projects have now generated some interesting results.

The clinical evaluation of the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) has shown that the children have made significant progress, with the youngest children (18 months to 3 years) advancing at a faster rate than the older children. This shows that the ESDM is effective in a group setting and that early intervention is most effective and efficient at an early age.

Another project has shown that those children who can spontaneously imitate adults and use objects in a functional way may be more likely to respond well to the ESDM. Those children without these

skills may need additional help, perhaps using other intervention techniques, to maximize their outcomes.

The comparative evaluation of our ESDM program in relation to other programs at the other Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centres around Australia is ongoing.

d. Interventions in educational settings

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale, in association with Ru Cai (formerly at OTARC), completed the data analysis and report for DHS (Vic) on the DHS-funded study 'Supporting Transition to and Participation in Tertiary Education for Students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder'. They found that students with an ASD are often not well prepared for transition to tertiary education and are not aware of the need for and benefits of disclosure of their difficulties to the disability support unit of the tertiary institution. As a consequence, on-time support is often not delivered and the teaching staff are not made aware of the student's needs.

Most teaching staff report that they do not have the skills or knowledge to support students with ASD adequately, and agree that formal professional development about ASD is required. Parents often feel that they are excluded from being involved in their child's education because of privacy policies of tertiary institutions, particularly when their children are aged over 18 years. This research will inform research in Core Program 3 of the Autism CRC with the capacity, initially, to improve service for tertiary students across four States.

Associate Professor Richdale is involved in a collaborative pilot study of the TOBY Playpad app for iPad, which is an ABA-based intervention for young children with an ASD. Professor Andrew Whitehouse (Telethon Institute, WA) is leading the project with Deakin and Monash Universities also participating.

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Publications

Papers in peer-reviewed journals

Arciuli, J., Stevens, K., **Trembath, D.**, & Simpson, I. (in press). The relationship between parent report of adaptive behavior and direct assessment of reading ability in children with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*.

Auert, E., **Trembath, D.**, Arciuli, J., & Thomas, D. (2012). Parents' expectations, awareness, and experiences of accessing evidence-based speech-language pathology services for their children with Autism. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 14, 109-118.

Baker, E., Richdale, A., Short, M., & Gradisar, M. (2013). An investigation of sleep patterns in adolescents with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder compared with typically developing adolescents. *Developmental Neurorehabilitation*, 16, 155-165

Barbaro, J. & Dissanayake, C. (2012). Developmental profiles of infants and toddlers with Autism Spectrum Disorders identified prospectively in a community-based setting. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 42, 1939-1948.

Barrett, B., Byford, S., Sharac, J., **Hudry, K.**, Leadbitter, K., Temple, K., Aldred, C., Slonims, V., Green, J., & the PACT Consortium (2012). Service and wider societal costs of pre-school children with autism in the UK. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 42, 797-804.

Bedford, R., Gliga, T., Frame, K., **Hudry, K.**, Chandler, S., Johnson, M., & Charman, T. (2013). Failure to learn from feedback underlies word learning difficulties in toddlers at risk for autism. *Journal of Child Language*, 40, 29-46.

Chandler, F., & Dissanayake, C. (in press). An Exploration of the internal working models of caregiver attachment during middle childhood in children with high-functioning Autistic Disorder. *Autism*.

Cheung, G., **Trembath, D.**, Arciuli, J., & Togher, L. (2012). The impact of workplace factors on evidence-based speech pathology practice for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *International Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*. Online first, DOI:10.3109/17549507.2012.714797

Clifford, S., **Hudry, K.**, Elsabbagh, M., Charman, T., Johnson, M. H., & the BASIS Team (2013). Temperament in the first two years of life in infants at high-risk for autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 43, 673-686.

Elsabbagh, M. Mercure, E., **Hudry, K.**, Chandler, S., Pasco, G., Charman, T., Pickles, A., Baron-Cohen, S., Bolton, P., Johnson, M. H., & the BASIS Team (2012). Infant neural sensitivity to dynamic eye gaze is associated with later emerging autism. *Current Biology*, 22, 338-342.

Elsabbagh, M., Gliga, T., Pickles, A., **Hudry, K.**, Charman, T., Johnson, M. H., & the BASIS Team (in press). The development of face orienting mechanisms in infants at-risk for autism. *Behavioural Brain Research*.

Gokcen, E., Petrides, K.V., **Hudry, K.**, Frederickson, N., & Smillie, L.D. (in press). Sub-threshold autism traits: The role of trait emotional intelligence and cognitive flexibility. *British Journal of Psychology*.

Gliga, T., Elsabbagh, M., **Hudry, K.**, Charman, T., Johnson, M. H., & the BASIS team (2012). The use of social cues for word learning in toddlers on the broader autism phenotype. *Child Development*, 83, 926-938.

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Gunn, K., **Trembath, D., & Hudry, K.** (in press). An examination of interactions among children with autism and their typically developing peers. *Developmental Neurorehabilitation*.

Hudry, K., Aldred, C., Wigham, S., Green, J., Leadbitter, K., Temple, K., Barlow, K., McConachie, H., & the PACT Consortium (in press). Predictors of parent-child interaction style in dyads with autism. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*.

Hudry, K., Chandler, S., Bedford, R., Pasco, G., Gliga, T., Elsabbagh, M., Johnson, M. H., Charman, T., & the BASIS Team (in press). Early language profiles in infants at high-risk for autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*.

Jacobs, D. W. & **Richdale A. L.** (2013). Predicting literacy in children with a high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 34, 2379-2390.

Lindell, A.K., & **Hudry, K.** (in press). Atypicalities in cortical structure, handedness, and functional lateralization for language in autism spectrum disorders. *Neuropsychology Review*.

McStay, R., Dissanayake, C., Scheeren, A., Koot, H. M. & Begeer, S. (in press). Parenting stress and autism: The role of age, autism severity, quality of life, and problem behaviour of children and adolescents with autism. *Autism*.

Nielsen, M., Slaughter, V., & **Dissanayake, C.** (in press). Object-directed imitation in children with high-functioning autism: Testing the social motivation Hypothesis. *Autism Research*.

Nuske, H., Vivanti, G., Dissanayake, C. (2013). Are emotions unique, universal, or specific in autism spectrum disorder? A comprehensive review. *Cognition and Emotion*. Online first, DOI:10.1080/02699931.2012.762900

Richdale, A. (2013). A behavioural infant sleep intervention does not have long-lasting effects on children's emotions or behaviour, child-parent relationship or maternal outcomes. *Commentary. Evidence Based Mental Health*, 16, 41.

Trembath, D., Germano, C., Johanson, G., & Dissanayake, C. (2012). The experience of anxiety in young adults with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Focus on Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 27, 213-224. Online first, DOI:10.1177/1088357612454916

Trembath, D., Iacono, T., Lyon, K., West, D., & Johnson, H. (in press). Augmentative and Alternative Communication supports for adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*.

Vivanti, G., Dissanayake, C., Zierhut, C., Roger, S.J., & the Victorian ASELCC Team (2013). Brief Report: Predictors of outcomes in the Early Start Denver Model delivered in a group setting. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*. 43, 1717-1724. DOI:10.1007/s10803-012-1705-7

Vivanti, G., Hudry, K., Trembath, D., Barbaro, J., Richdale, A., & Dissanayake, C. (2013). Towards the DSM 5 criteria for autism: Clinical, cultural and research implications. *Australian Psychologist*, 48, 258-261. DOI:10.1111/ap.12008

Vivanti, G., Barbaro, J., Hudry, K., Dissanayake, C., & Prior, M. (2013). Intellectual development in Autism Spectrum Disorders: New insights from longitudinal studies. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 7. Online first, DOI: 10.3389/fnhum.2013.00354

Whitehouse, A. J. O., Mattes., E., Maybery, M., **Dissanayake, C.**, Sawyer, M., Jones, R. M., Pennell, C., Keelan, J., & Hickey, M. (in press). Perinatal testosterone exposure and the autism phenotype. *Journal of Neurodevelopmental Disorders*.

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Book chapters

Dissanayake, C. (2013). Social behavior and social impairment. In F. Volkmar (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Springer.

Duncan, E., & **Vivanti, G.** (2013). Team approach. In F. Volkmar (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of Autism and Related Disorders* (pp. 3074-3076). Springer.

Esposito, G., & **Vivanti, G.** (2013). Gross motor skills. In F. Volkmar (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of Autism and Related Disorders* (pp. 1459-1462). Springer.

Hudry, K. (2013). Communicative development inventories. In F. Volkmar (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Springer.

Jacobs, D. & **Richdale, A.** (in press). Language and literacy subtypes in young children with a high functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder. In J. Arcuili & J. Brock (Eds.), *Communication in autism. Trends in language acquisition research series*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Richdale, A. L. (2013). Autism and other developmental disabilities. In A. R. Wolfson & H. E. Montgomery-Downs (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of infant, child, and adolescent sleep and behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vivanti, G. (2013) Imitation of body movements. In F. Volkmar (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of autism and related disorders* (pp. 466-467). Springer.

Vivanti, G. (2013) Micrographia. In F. Volkmar (Ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Autism and Related Disorders* (p. 1855). Springer.

Vivanti, G. (2013) Macrographia. In F. Volkmar (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of autism and related disorders* (p. 1779). Springer.

Vivanti, G. (2013). Imitation in autism spectrum disorders: from research to treatment. In d. Riva,

S. Bulgheroni & M. Zappella, (Eds.), *Neurobiology, diagnosis and treatment in autism - An update* (pp. 161-165). Mountrouge: John Libbey Eurotext.

Vivanti, G., & Hamilton A. (in press) Imitation in Autism Spectrum Disorders. In F. Volkmar, R. Paul, S. Rogers, K. Pelphrey, (Eds.), *The handbook of autism and pervasive developmental disorders (4th ed.)*. New York: Wiley.

Vivanti, G. (in press) Imitation in Autism Spectrum Disorders: From research to treatment. In D. Riva, & I. Rapin (Eds.), *Neurobiology, diagnosis, and treatment in Autism Spectrum Disorders*. Libbey Eurotext.

Conferences

(in chronological order)

Oral and poster presentations and invited keynote addresses given at both national and international conferences by staff and students at the Centre are listed below.

July 2012

The International Society for Augmentative and Alternative Communication Conference in Pittsburgh, USA

Tan, X. Y., Trembath, D., Bloomberg, K., & Iacono, T. *An Evaluation of Key Word Signing for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

Trembath, D., Iacono, T., & **Caithness, T.** A *Comparative Study Examining the Effectiveness of Speech Generating Devices for Children with ASD.*

Trembath, D., Vivanti, G., Dissanayake, C., & Iacono, T. *Autism, Visual Attention, and AAC: An Eye Tracking Study.*

Yong, S., Hill, K., Balandin, S., & **Trembath, D.** *Peer Mediated AAC Intervention in the Classroom.*

20th Congress of the International Association for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Allied Professions (IACAPAP) in Paris, France

Vivanti, G. *Predictors of Treatment Outcomes in Toddlers with Autism Spectrum Disorders.*

August 2012

AMAZE Victorian Autism Research Conference, Melbourne.

Barbaro, J. & Dissanayake, C. *Diagnostic Stability of Autism Spectrum Disorders and Predictors of Crossover in Toddlers Prospectively Identified in a Community-Based Setting.*

Hudry, K. *Community Service Providers' View and Experiences Regarding Bilingualism and Autism.*

Richdale, A. *Sleep in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

Vivanti, G. *Group delivery of the Early Start Denver Model: The Margot Prior Wing.*

September 2012

The Speech Pathologists, Physiotherapists, and Occupational Therapists on Developmental Disability National Conference, Sydney.

Dr David Trembath participated at an invited discussion panel on "Where have we been and where are we going?"

Trembath, D., Vivanti, G., Dissanayake, C., & Iacono, T. *AAC and Eye Tracking: A Study of Learning in Children with ASD.*

Trembath, D. *Practice is research: Supporting the use of single case experimental designs in clinical practice.*

Australian Psychological Society Conference, Perth

Forsyth, C. & Richdale, A. *What Can Attention Deficits tell Us About Autism Spectrum Disorder?*

Professional practice forum "DSM-5 Development and Controversies"

Richdale, A. *Autism Spectrum Disorder: DSM-5 Proposal*

Professional practice forum "Psychological testing: Current issues and approaches"

Richdale, A. *Assessment: Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

November 2012

AMAZE Autism Research Forum, Melbourne

Barbaro, J. & Dissanayake, C. *Diagnostic Stability of Autism Spectrum Disorders and Predictors of Crossover in Toddlers Prospectively Identified in a Community-based Setting.*



Bishop, N., Tran, J., Wearne, T. & Barth, C. *Understanding Mitochondrial Dysfunction in autism.*

Cai, R., Richdale, A. & Dissanayake, C. *Supporting Tertiary Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Online mentoring.*

Chaudry, M., Dissanayake, C. & Barbaro, J. *The Development of Pretend Play in Young Children with and without ASD.*

Dissanayake, C., Newbigin, A. & Leung, S. *Self in School-aged Children with High-functioning Autism.*

Green, C., Dissanayake, C., Loesch, D. & Bui, M. *Growth Dysregulation in Boys with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

Hudry, K., Clifford, S., Elsabbagh, M., Charman, T., Johnson, M.H., and the BASIS Team. *Temperament in infants later diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders.*

Jayasinghe, K., Dissanayake, C. & Vivanti, G. *Emotion Salience in Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

Joshi, R. Dissanayake, C. & Barbaro, J. *Gender Differences in Observed Social Attention and Repetitive Behaviours in Autism Spectrum Disorder from Toddlerhood and Pre-school Age.*

McStay, R., Begeer, S., Dissanayake, C., Scheeren, A. & Koot, H. *Parenting Stress and Autism: The Role of Age, Autism Severity, Quality of Life, and Problem Behaviour of Children and Adolescents with High-functioning Autism.*

Nuske, H., Dissanayake, C., Hudry, K. & Vivanti, G. *Normative Reactivity to Emotions of Familiar People in Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

Pezzotto, E., Hudry, K. & Germano, C. *The Relationship between Contagious Yawning, Empathy, and Social Skills of Typically Developing Children.*

Trembath, D., Vivanti, G., Dissanayake, C. & Iacono, T. *Are Children with Autism Really Visual Learners? A Communication and Eye Tracking Study.*

Vivanti, G. & Dissanayake, C. *Mechanisms Underlying Imitative Learning in ASD.*

November 2012

Australian Psychological Society, Educational & Developmental Psychology Conference, Melbourne

Richdale, A., Cai, R. & Dissanayake, C. *Supporting Tertiary Education Staff Working with Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Workshop Evaluation.*

The Australian Conference on Personality and Individual Differences (ACPID), Melbourne University

Hudry, K., Clifford, S., Elsabbagh, M., Charman, T., Johnson, M.H. and the BASIS Team, *Temperament in Infants Later Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders.*

December 2012

Australasian Society for Autism Research (ASfAR) Inaugural Conference, Macquarie University, NSW

Baker, E., Richdale, A., Short, M. & Gradisar, M. *Sleep, Anxiety and Depression in High-functioning Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

Barbaro, J. & Dissanayake, C. *Diagnostic Stability of Autism Spectrum Disorders and Predictors of Crossover in Toddlers Prospectively Identified in a Community-Based Setting.*

Chaudry, M. & Dissanayake, C. *The Development of Pretend Play in Young Children With and Without ASD.*

Dissanayake, C. *Changes to Autism Diagnosis in DSM-5." Preconference Workshop*

Dissanayake, C., Newbigin, A. & Leung, S. *The Self in School-aged Children with High-functioning Autism.*

Green, C., Dissanayake, C., Loesch, D. & Bui, M. *Growth Dysregulation in Boys with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

Hudry, K., Clifford, S., Elsabbagh, M., Charman, T., Johnson, M.H., and the BASIS Team, *Temperament in Infants Later Diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders.*

Jayasinghe, K., Dissanayake, C. & Vivanti, G. *Emotion salience in young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

Joshi, R. & Dissanayake, C. *Gender Differences in Autism Spectrum Disorder from Infancy to Pre-School Age.*

McStay, R., Scheeren, A., Koot, H., Begeer, S. & **Dissanayake, C.** *Parenting stress and autism: The Role of Age, Autism Severity, Quality of Life, and Problem Behavior of Children and Adolescents with High-functioning Autism.*

Nuske, H., Dissanayake, C., Vivanti, G. & Hudry, K. *Normative Reactivity to the Emotions of Familiar People in Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

Richdale, A., Cai, R. & Dissanayake, C. *Supporting Tertiary Education Staff Working with Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Workshop Evaluation.*

Trembath, D., Vivanti, G., Dissanayake, C. & Iacono, T. *Visual Attention to Augmentative Communication Instruction among Children with ASD.*

Vivanti, G. *Social Cognition in Autism.*

Vivanti, G., Zierhut, C. & **Dissanayake, C.** *Predictors of Outcomes in the Early Start Denver Model.*

January 2013

BioAutism Conference 2013, Melbourne



Wearne, T., Tran, J., Barth, C. & **Bishop, N.** *Understanding Autism in Patients with 4p16.3 microdeletions.*

Green, C., Dissanayake, C., Loesch, D. & Bui, M. *Growth Dysregulation in Boys with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

Nuske, H., Vivanti, G., Hudry, K. & Dissanayake, C. *Atypical Physiological Reactivity to Emotions in Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

March 2013

1st World Conference on Personality (WCP), Stellenbosch, South Africa

Hudry, K. *Understanding Cognition in Autism Spectrum Disorders: Social and Flexible Cognition in the General Population.*

Continued next page



April 2013

Best practices for early diagnosis and intervention in Autism Spectrum Disorders: An Italian-Israeli Consensus Conference, Jerusalem, Israel.

Vivanti, G. *Implementation of the Early Start Denver Model in a Group Setting: Clinical Outcomes and Predictors of Outcomes.* (Invited lecture)

May 2013

International Meeting of Autism Researchers (IMFAR)



Professor Dissanayake, Dr Vivanti, Caroline McCormick and Costanza Colombi on the IMFAR Special Interest Group Panel.

Crea, K.N., Dissanayake, C. & Hudry, K. *Mental Health Difficulties in Toddlers At High-Risk for Autism Spectrum Disorders.*

Nuske, H., Vivanti, G., Hudry, K. & Dissanayake, C. *Normative Reactivity to the Emotions of Familiar People in Young Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

Barbaro, J., Ulusoy, E. & Dissanayake, C. *Determining the Efficacy of the SACS in Identifying Preschoolers with ASDs: Development of the SACSPreschool (SACS-Pr)*

Barbaro, J., Mitchell, A. & Dissanayake, C. *Developmental Surveillance Versus Screening for the Identification of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Infants and Toddlers.*

Chester, M. & **Richdale, A.** *The Impact of a Social Skills Training Program on Social Competence and Social Worries in Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

Elsabbagh, M., Mercure, E., **Hudry, K.**, Pasco, G., Charman, T., Pickles, A., Johnson, M.H. and the BASIS Team. *Processes of Risk and Resilience in the Developing Brain: Evidence From Infants at Risk for Autism.*

Hudry, K., Aldred, C.R., Wigham, S., Green, J., Leadbitter, K., Temple, K., Barlow, K., McConachie, H. and the PACT Consortium. *Predictors of Parent-Child Interaction Style in Dyads Where Children Have Autism.*

Scientific Panel: Beyond the RCT: Extending Delivery of the Early Start Denver Model in the Real World to Foster Best Practice

Session Chair: C. Dissanayake

Dissanayake, C., Zierhut, C. & Vivanti, G. *Group Delivery of the Early Start Denver Model: Treatment Outcomes.*

Vivanti, G., Zierhut, C. & Dissanayake, C. *Social and Non-Social Abilities Are Differentially Associated to Treatment Gains in Different Domains.*

Preconference Event: Special Interest Group on Sleep

Richdale, A. & Katz, T. *Sleep Education Dissemination In Australia And The United States.*

Grants

National Health and Medical Research Council Partnership Grant (2011-2013) – Universal Surveillance and Early Identification of Developmental Disorders – V.Eapen, K.Williams, B.Jaludin, **C.Dissanayake** & S.Woolfenden.

National Health and Medical Research Council Project Grant (2011-2015) – Prenatal and Early Postnatal Risk Factors in ASD – A.Whitehouse, M.Maybery, **C.Dissanayake**, M.Hickey & C.Pennell.

The Apex Foundation Trust for Autism (2012-2015) – Circadian Rhythm Dysfunction in Adults with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder: Evidence from Dim-Light Melatonin Onset – PhD student award to **E.Baker**, supervised by **A.Richdale** & A.Hazi.

La Trobe University Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering 'Near Miss' Grant – **Dissanayake, C.**, Iacano, T., **Vivanti, G.**, & **Trembath, D.**

William & Vera Houston Memorial Trust/ANZ Trustees, Scoping Study to Develop a research program on Parents with ASD, **Dissanayake, C.**

National Health and Medical Research Council Project Grant (2013-2015) – Characterization of a novel epigenetic boundary and long range epigenetic modifications specific to FMR1 expansion carriers with behavioural and cognitive disorders – implications for earlier diagnosis and treatment. – H.Slater, D.Godler, D.Amor, **C.Dissanayake** & Q.Bui.

Australian Wool Innovation (2012-13) - Bedding and sleep quality in children aged 2 to 5 years - **A. Richdale.**

R E Ross Trust (2012-2013) - Early Diagnostic Clinic for Autism Spectrum Disorders - **C. Dissanayake and the Early Assessment Clinic Team.**

Phylliss Connor Grant (2012-2013) - Early Diagnostic Clinic for Autism Spectrum Disorders - **C. Dissanayake and the Early Assessment Clinic Team.**

The William Buckland Foundation (2012-2014) - Early Diagnostic Clinic for Autism Spectrum Disorders - **C. Dissanayake and the Early Assessment Clinic Team.**

Australian Research Council Project Grant (2010-2012) – Language processing in children with high functioning autism: Evidence from eye tracking – E.Bavin, **C.Dissanayake**, E. Kidd & **M.Prior.**

La Trobe University Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering Early Career Researcher award (2012) – The Social Attention and Communication Study-Revised (SACS-R): A pilot study evaluating the efficacy of the SACS-R in identifying infants and toddlers with Autism Spectrum Disorders – **J.Barbaro.**

The Menzies Allied Health Start Up Grant (2012) – The Social Attention and Communication Study-Revised (SACS-R): A pilot study evaluating the efficacy of the SACS-R in identifying infants and toddlers with Autism Spectrum Disorders – **J.Barbaro.**

The Ian Potter Foundation Travel Award (2012) – Attending ASSID conference in Wellington NZ – **D. Trembath**

Australia-China Science and Research Fund (2012) – Group Mission for Collaboration with Nankai University in the field of Autism Spectrum Disorders – **C.Dissanayake.**

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2012) – CRC Living with ASD Phenotyping Project – **C.Dissanayake.**

La Trobe University e-Research Grant (2012) – Mobiles for Autism: The use of biosensors and real-time mobile data mining to assist people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder – **C.Dissanayake, S. Loke, C. Germano & W. Nadachowski**



OTARC Meetings

Research Seminar Meetings

Members of OTARC, staff and students meet monthly to hear about and discuss the latest research. Presentations are given by OTARC staff and students, as well as external invited guests.

Lab Meetings for students

OTARC students meet monthly with the Laboratory Manager, Carmela Germano, and relevant staff, to address their ongoing work and research needs. They are also invited to presentations by staff designed to support their research activities and writing their research proposals and thesis.

Staff Meetings

A formal staff meeting is held monthly. Informal staff meetings occur frequently through each week as required to discuss administration and research ideas, directions and needs. This enables us to foster our collaborative research initiatives around particular projects.

The OTARC Advisory committee

This committee (*see Page 41*) meets three times each year to guide the direction of the Centre.

Objective 2

Facilitate collaboration with other research centres, both nationally and internationally

Our research collaborations continue to grow, and the commencement of the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders in July 2013 will result in an even greater number of large collaborative projects in the coming year. We continue to have a constant stream of visitors to our Centre, including from Asia, and have also increased the number of researchers we are collaborating with on various projects. Our staff have also visited other researchers and centers around the world to engage in collaborative projects. Below is a sample of our current collaborators and visitors.

Collaborations

International Collaborations

Dr Nusrat Yasmeen Ahmed, Flinders University & Director of the Hope Autism Center in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Dr Nusrat is also one of our academic adjuncts and visits the centre regularly. She is also volunteering at the Margot Prior Wing with the aim of learning about the program of early learning and teaching children with an ASD implemented there.

Dr Sander Begeer, Developmental Psychology, VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands, currently on study leave at the University of Sydney.

Professor Tony Charman, Centre for Research in Autism and Education, Institute of Education, University of London, UK.

Professor Pat Howlin, Institute of Psychiatry, King's College, London, UK.

Professor Mark Johnson, Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development, School of Psychology, Birkbeck College, London, UK.

Dr Emiko Kesuka, Gunma Prefecture Women's University, Japan, on the Early Identification of ASDs.

Dr Joanna Kwasiborska, Speech Therapist (Adesse) and Lecturer, Department of Speech Therapy, Academy of Special Education, Warsaw, Poland.

Professor Sue Leekam, Chair of Autism Research, Wales Autism Research Centre, Cardiff University, UK.

Professor Beth Malow, Dr Blythe Corbett and Dr Suzanne Goldman, Kennedy Center, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, USA.

Professor Sally Rogers, MIND Institute, University of California, Davis in Sacramento, USA.

Dr Kimberley Schreck, School of Behavioral Sciences & Education, Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburgh, USA.

Dr Margaret Souders, University of Pennsylvania, USA.

Professor Elizabeth Starr, Faculty of Education, University of Windsor, Ontario Canada.

A/Professor Chongying Wang, Director of the Center for Behavioural Science, Medical School, Nankai University, Tianjin, China.

Dr Kent Williams, Nationwide Children's Hospital, Columbus, Ohio

Dr Cynthia Zierhut, MIND Institute, University of California, Davis in Sacramento, USA.

National Collaborations

Dr Joanne Arciuli, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Sydney

Dr Charles Claudianos, Queensland Brain Institute, University of Queensland.

Continued next page



Professor Valsa Eapen, Chair of Infant, Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, University of New South Wales

Professor Torbjorn Falkmer & Ms Marika Falkmer, School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work, Curtin University

Dr Michael Gradisar, School of Psychology, Flinders University.

Dr Evan Kidd, Department of Psychology, University of Queensland.

Professor Murray Maybery, Department of Psychology, University of Western Australia

Dr Jess Paynter, AEIOU Foundation

Professor Andrew Whitehouse, Research Fellow, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research and University of Western Australia.

Victorian Collaborations

Dr Matt Hale, School of Psychological Science, La Trobe University

Professor Teresa Iacono, Head of Rural Health School, La Trobe University

Associate Professor Stephen Kent, Head of School, Psychological Science, La Trobe University

Dr Jordy Kaufman, Senior Research Fellow, Swinburne Brain Sciences Institute, Swinburne University of Technology

Dr John Lesku, Department of Zoology, La Trobe University

Dr Danuta Loesch, School of Psychological Science, La Trobe University

Associate Professor Professor Seng Loke, Engineering and Mathematical Sciences, La Trobe University

Ms Katie Lyon, SCOPE Victoria, Communication Resource Centre

Dr Cathy Maraffa and Professor Katrina Williams, Centre for Community Child Health and Department of Developmental Medicine, Royal Children's Hospital

Professor Dennis Moore, Graduate School of Education, Monash University

Dr Michelle Short, School of Psychology, Social Work and Social Policy, University of South Australia.

Dr Greg Somers, La Trobe Institute of Molecular Science, La Trobe University

Associate Professor Lesley Stirling and Dr Susan Douglas, Department of Linguistics, University of Melbourne

Associate Professor Geoff Stuart, School of Psychological Science, La Trobe University

Dr Torab Torabi, School of Computer Science, La Trobe University

Partnerships

We have continuing partnerships with the **Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER)** and **the Royal Children's Hospital**.

Continued next page

Visitors to our Centre



Professor Laura Hall from the Department of Special Education, College of Education, San Diego State University (SDSU), California USA spent a day at OTARC in August to discuss her research and possible collaboration between OTARC and SDSU.

Mr Paul Swan, Group Manager, Market Intelligence and Reporting, Australian Wool Innovation Limited and Ms Carol Stubbs met with Associate Professor Amanda Richdale in November regarding research collaboration on the use of wool in facilitating better sleep.



Dr Emiko Kezuka from Gunma Prefectural Women's University in Japan visited for the third time. She spent a month at OTARC working on a collaborative project on social attention with Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, Dr Josephine Barbaro and Ms Cathy Bent. Emiko presented her findings to date at our monthly research seminar.



Dr Marilyn J. Monteiro, a US psychologist and expert on diagnosing ASD, spent a day at OTARC in August 2012. She has developed an innovative, child- and family-focused method for evaluating, diagnosing, and talking about a child who may have an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Dr Robin Laycock, School of Psychological Science, La Trobe University, gave a presentation at our seminar entitled, "Can self-rated autistic traits predict visual processing anomalies?"

Dr Kylie Gray, from the Centre for Developmental Psychiatry & Psychology at Monash University presented her research into ASD entitled 'Early in Life Mental Health Service (ELMHS)' at our September monthly seminar.

Dr Liu (Director of Child Health, Tianjin, China) visited OTARC and the Margot Prior Wing. Her visit was in preparation for OTARC staff to visit her in China to train professionals in early identification and monitoring of children with symptoms of ASD.

Continued next page



Visitors to our Centre *continued*



Dr Peter Enticott, Senior Research Fellow, Alfred Psychiatry Research Centre, Monash University, gave a presentation at the OTARC seminar in April. He spoke on “Clinical trials of repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation (rTMS) in autism spectrum disorder” He is seen here after his presentation with some of OTARC’s staff and students.

In February 2013 we enjoyed visitors from Italy, Israel and Western Australia on the same day. We used the opportunity to exchange research ideas in a collaborative meeting that lasted for several hours.



Some of the OTARC team with visitors Professor Stefano Vicari (standing, second from left), Professor Giovanni Valeri (standing, third from left), Dr Luigi Mazzone (standing third from right), Ms Lauren Hollier (Seated, second from left) and Professor Nurit Yirmiya (seated, fourth from left).

Professor Nurit Yirmiya, from the School of Psychology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem visited in February. Her research interests include studies on developmental trajectories of preterm infants, associations between perinatal, postnatal and genetic factors and developmental characteristics of young children, characteristics of the broad autism phenotype in siblings of children with autism, and resolution of the diagnosis among parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Professor Stefano Vicari (MD) is a Child and Adolescent Neuropsychiatrist, and Professor of Psychophysiology and of Developmental Pathologies. He is Head of the Child and Adolescent Neuropsychiatry Unit at the Bambino Gesù’ Hospital in Rome. He works with children and adolescents with ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder or Learning Disabilities in a clinical and scientific capacity. His research involves genetic, brain imaging and cognitive studies.

Professor Giovanni Valeri (MD, PhD) is a child and adolescent psychiatrist and Professor of Psychiatry at the Bambino Gesù’ Hospital in Rome. He specialises in the diagnosis and treatment of children and adolescents with ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder or Learning Disabilities.

Dr Luigi Mazzone (MD) is a researcher at the Bambino Gesù’ Hospital in Rome.



Professor Murray Maybery, Autism researcher and Head of the School of Psychology at the University of Western Australia, visited OTARC in May to find out more about our Early Assessment Clinic and the Margot Prior Wing.

He is seen here with Dr Nancy Sadka, Intake Officer at the Early Assessment Clinic.

Continued next page

Visitors to our Centre *continued*



In May this year **Dr Do Thuy Lan**, Psychiatrist and Director of the Morning Star Centre for children with disabilities, Hanoi, Vietnam, and **Mrs Vu Thi Thu Huong**, teacher at the Centre, visited us to learn more about early identification and assessment of ASD, as well as the Early Start Denver Model early intervention program implemented at the Margot Prior Wing. They were supported by the Fishing Rod Foundation and are seen here with Professor Cheryl Dissanayake (left) and Dr Elfriede Ihsen (right).



Mr Colin Brooks (MP), Member for Bundoora and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education; and **Ms Jenny Mikakos**, State Member for the Northern Metropolitan Region and Shadow Minister for Children and Young Adults visited OTARC in June to inform themselves about ASD and OTARC activities.

We also had several student visitors to our centre.

This year we welcomed:

Ms Lauren Hollier is a Post Graduate student from the University of Western Australia. (*Lauren is in the group photo on Page 20.*)



Vu Song Ha with Professor Cheryl Dissanayake

Vu Song Ha is a health professional from Vietnam and a PhD student with Professor Sylvia Rodger at the School of Population Health, University of Queensland. She is researching the social construction of Autism in Vietnam. She visited OTARC in November 2012.



Alexandra Perks, a student from Birmingham, UK, interested in Autism and dental care, visited with Dr Josephine Barbaro and Dr David Trembath.



Jessica Siljehav and **Olov Falkmer**, who are undertaking a Bachelor of Occupational Therapy at Lund University, Faculty of Medicine, Sweden, visited OTARC in August and September. They were studying as exchange students for Semester 2 at La Trobe University in the Department of Occupational Therapy, Faculty of Health Sciences and were collecting data for a research project undertaken by Professor Torbjorn Falkmer, Curtin University, in collaboration with OTARC.



OTARC staff visiting other researchers

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake travelled to Gunma Prefecture in Japan to train professionals on the early signs of ASD as part of our Social Attention and Communication Surveillance Project, and is undertaking a joint project on the SACS-J with **Dr Emiko Kezuka** Gunma Women's University.

Dr Kristelle Hudry and **Dr Josephine Barbaro** visited **Professor Catherine Lord**, Director of the Center for Autism and the Developing Brain (CADB), at Cornell University, New York.

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, **Dr Josephine Barbaro** and **Associate Professor Amanda Richdale** travelled to Tianjin, China to train professionals on the early signs of ASD as part of our Social Attention and Communication Surveillance Project, and are undertaking a joint project (SACS-C) with **Associate Professor Chonying Wang** from Nankai University.

Dr Kristelle Hudry and **Heather Nuske**, PhD student spent a week in London visiting **Professor Tony Charman** at the Institute of Psychiatry and **Professor Mark Johnson** at Birkbeck, University of London. They also attended the Centre for Research in Autism and Education (CRAE), where **Dr Liz Pellicano** is Director, and the 2013 CRAE Annual lecture given by **Professor Connie Kasari**, who was visiting from UCLA.

Dr Josephine Barbaro visited the Hope Autism Centre in Dhaka, Bangladesh, together with **Dr Nusrat Yasmeen Ahmed** to train staff on early identification (SACS-B) and intervention.



Professor Prior with the WARC team

Professor Margot Prior visited the Wales Autism Research Centre (WARC) at Cardiff University in early June. She is the External Advisor to the Centre which is considered to be a sister research centre to OTARC. The Director of WARC and Chair of Autism at Cardiff University, is **Professor Sue Leekam** who worked with Professor Prior at La Trobe in the early 1990s as a Research Fellow. She has visited OTARC several times over the years and also undertakes collaborative work with **Professor Dissanayake**.

Objective 3

Foster and support a National Research Network investigating the cause and management of ASD.



In February this year funding of \$31 million was announced by the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard for a new 'Cooperative Research Centres for Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders'. Together with contributions from universities, including La Trobe, not-for-profit participants, and industry partners, there will be a total of \$104 million available over 8 years for research on ASDs aimed at improving the lives of people with an ASD and their families. OTARC was instrumental in developing the proposal for the CRC over a period of two year, together with 11 other essential participants. The CRC has three core programs:

1. A better start through better diagnosis

Research in this core program will include identification of early behavioural and biological markers leading to earlier diagnosis and seamless integration between diagnostic and early intervention services.

2. Enhancing teaching and learning

The focus of research here will be on the identification of key elements of ASD-friendly education programs and transitions, training of teachers and other school staff.

3. Finding a place in society

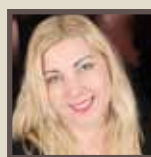
One of the main aims of research in this area is to get information about young people and adults with an ASD and the support they need. Other research will look at developing and evaluating different employment models, and social and community engagement and independent living programs.

While research will occur at various centres across Australia, OTARC will be coordinating two of the sub programs: **Professor Dissanayake** will lead work on identifying pathways to ASD diagnosis (Core Program 1), while **Associate Professor Amanda Richdale** will be responsible for studies on enabling young people and adults with an ASD to access further education and employment opportunities (Core Program 2). For more information see <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc/research/crc-for-living-with-autism-spectrum-disorders>.



The Australasian Society for Autism Research (ASfAR) is a member based organization devoted to advancing knowledge about Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) through research and scholarship.. The inaugural ASfAR research conference was held in Sydney in December 2012 with many OTARC staff and students attending and presenting (see Conference Presentations). The new Executive Committee of ASfAR was ratified at the Annual General Meeting following the conference. It comprises:

Professor Katrina Williams (Chair)
Professor Cheryl Dissanayake (Co-chair)
Dr Trevor Clark (Secretary)
Ms Sandra Devaraj (Assistant Secretary)
Professor Deb Keen
Associate Professor Andrew Whitehouse
Associate Professor Mark Stokes
Dr Jon Brock



Ms Nicole Grant was the Olga Tennison PhD Scholarship recipient studying at the University of Queensland. Nicole's scholarship ended June 30, 2013.

Objective 4

Conduct campaigns to improve the public profile of autism research, thereby attracting additional research funds via grants and donations.

We continue to undertake and participate in activities to enhance the profile of autism research in the community. We advocate for research by using the print, radio and television media where possible, as well as social media to extend our reach. We also participate in events such as World Autism Awareness Day to promote autism research.

Our Facebook site is very active and attracts many visitors with over 1090 friends at last count. We also have many followers on Twitter (individuals and organisations) who, in turn, reach out to many thousands of other followers!

The OTARC website now attracts approximately 1500 visits each month (www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc). This is an increase of over 500 from the previous twelve months. We have in excess of 2610 contacts on our email list. Subscribers receive our quarterly newsletter 'Another Piece'. The Newsletter has undergone dramatic changes this year and is now distributed in a Blog format thanks to We R Digital who built the blog pro bono; see <http://otarc.blogs.latrobe.edu.au>. The BLOG received 2118 visits in its first month. We also have 435 new participants on the OTARC database.

Our website has also been restructured over the last year with improvements made to navigation.

We have also launched a new promotional logo for our website to promote our research and help attract participants.



“Ask a Researcher” Service

We continue to answer questions via our 'Ask a Researcher' online service. Questions typically come from parents and professionals. Several of these questions and answers were published in our newsletters and more recently in our new blog. Copies of newsletters can be accessed on our website <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc/about> the address for our blog is <http://otarc.blogs.latrobe.edu.au/>

Media Activity

July 2012

Dr Josephine Barbaro was interviewed by the Australasian Science Magazine about her recent awards and new research projects.

August 2012

Dr Giacomo Vivanti recorded an interview (about the ABC TV's Four Corners show 'The Autism Enigma') for the Italian news program on SBS radio. The interview (in Italian) was broadcast on 31st August (Friday evening) at 6.15pm.

September 2012

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake and **Dr Naomi Bishop** were interviewed to give expert opinions for an article by Neil Bramwell entitled 'Treating autism with diet lacks evidence: experts' that appeared in The Medical Observer on September 4. The article was in response to the program on Four Corners program 'The Autism Enigma'.

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake was featured September 5 on the ABC Radio National program The World Today about the changes to the diagnostic criteria for ASD in the 'Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition'.

Continued next page

On 27 August the ABC TV Four Corners program screened a documentary entitled 'The Autism Enigma' in which it was claimed that some types of Autism Spectrum Disorders could be triggered by harmful gut bacteria. In response, OTARC released a statement rebutting some of the claims made in this documentary. We argued in particular that the 'gut theory' is just that, a theory, and that the research to support it is in the early stages. The findings to date provide no evidence thus far that gut bacteria and their by-products cause ASDs, or that treating the gut can alleviate the specific symptoms of ASD. This was also taken up by the La Trobe University internal newsletter 'UniNews' and the 'E-News' of La Trobe University Alumni and Advancement and received an unprecedented number of hits. We had 4500 visits to our website on this issue.

October 2012

Dr Josephine Barbaro was interviewed by Stephen Luntz for an article entitled 'Early Autism Diagnosis' which appeared in Australasian Science.

November 2012

Dr Kristelle Hudry gave an interview about 'Contagious Yawning' for ABC Radio – Goulburn/ Murray Region.

December 2012

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake was interviewed about the changes in the DSM-5 for an article 'Parents Fear Loss of Funding' that appeared in The Australian.

Dr Giacomo Vivanti contributed to an online article regarding the changes to DSM-5: 'Asperger's dumped as official disorder: It's going to set the whole journey back' for Perth Now (Online media)

Dr Giacomo Vivanti was also interviewed by the online journal The Conversation on the topic 'Study reveals autism treatment clues.' He discussed his research on the effectiveness of the Early Start Denver Model of early intervention.

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake was interviewed about her work at OTARC by Rebecca Kelly on Real People ASD Talk Radio (Phoenix FM 106.7), Bendigo.

The Australian newspaper published an article entitled 'Redefining the Spectrum – Proposed changes to the diagnosis of autism and Asperger's are unsettling' by Sean Parnell. This article was about the DSM-5 forum OTARC held in 2012 and the public response to this event. The article contained quotes from **Professor Dissanayake**.

February 2013

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake was interviewed for the Nine-MSN – Health and Wellbeing website about the article 'Children with autism have higher levels of toxic chemicals in their blood', which described a study by Kimberly Gillan.

April 2013

Dr Kristelle Hudry was interviewed by Stephen Pincock for ABC News in Science on 'Learning bonus for blind parents' kids'.

Dr Kristelle Hudry wrote a piece for The Conversation: 'Deprivation, autism and disability shine a light on development.' A copy of this article is also on our OTARC blog at <http://otarc.blogs.latrobe.edu.au/deprivation-autism-and-disability-shine-a-light-on-development/#more-837>

Dr Kristelle Hudry was also interviewed on this topic for Vision Australia Radio for the Today in Focus program, which is a round-up of news and current-affairs.

May 2013



Dr Hudry (centre) at the BBC studio

Dr Kristelle Hudry attended BBC Broadcasting House in London for a radio interview about the importance of the eyes and communication skills in infants of blind parents. The interview was broadcast on BBC Radio 4, in a program called In Touch. To hear this program - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01s8cpc>

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake wrote a piece for The Conversation (Blog) entitled 'Mums and dads, don't ignore the early signs of autism' which is also available on the OTARC blog at <http://otarc.blogs.latrobe.edu.au/mums-and-dads-dont-ignore-the-early-signs-of-autism/#more-1019>



Donations

A total of \$534,761.00 was received in donations.

Organisations

The Fishing Rod Foundation

Individuals

Olga Tennison
Mrs June Hay
Mr & Mrs Bernie Kiekebosch
Dr Susan Cotton
Ms Carmelo Imbezi (through CAF)
Dr Amanda Richdale
An Anonymous donor
John Aitken
Joanne Forrest
Universities Australia
Melissa Hinder
Phillip Nam
Wendy Kozica

Through Everyday Hero (Peer to Peer donations)

Mrs. Vicki Potter
Mr. David Potter
Mrs. Alex Vrcic
Mrs. Frances Simmons
Ms Christine Boulter
Ms Lisa Sinclair
Miss Beth McLachlan
Mr Graham Prossor
Mr Michael Coates
Peter Roberts
Mrs Maryon Walters
Mr Peter Hunt
Mr Peter Moore
Mrs Heather Carr

Peter's Birthday Gift



We'd like to highlight Peter Walter's great idea. He asked for donations to OTARC instead of presents for his birthday. He created a donations page on Everyday Hero and invited his friends to participate. We are happy to say Peter raised well over a thousand dollars (his original goal) for Autism Research at OTARC. Peter's donors are in our 'Donations & Grants' listing. Thanks Peter!

Mr Michael Lang
Mr Duncan Adams
Mr Nick McKillop
Jill and John McLachlan
Mr Murray Mehmet
Mr Roger Trewenack
Ms Linda Cooper
Jan Swinburne
Mrs Barbara Osborne
Mr Phillip Nam
Mr Peter Walters
An Anonymous Donor

Objective 5

Provide opportunities for student based research and early career mentoring programs

We have 24 students (Honours, Masters, Doctoral, and PhD candidates) undertaking their research at the centre. Twelve students successfully completed their studies in the last twelve months.

Postgraduate students

PhD Candidates

Emma Baker - The role of melatonin in sleep disorders in individuals with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Cathy Bent - What are the barriers and enablers to the early identification of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Australia?

Kristy Logan - The effect of Aided Language Stimulation on the communication development of children with ASD.

Rucha Joshi - A longitudinal study of gender differences in the early development of girls and boys with an Autism Spectrum Disorder from infancy to their early childhood years, with a specific emphasis on the developmental profiles of girls.

Heather Nuske - Emotional reactivity in young children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (aged 2-5 years), using eye tracking technology.

Kitty Wan - Investigating cortisol and oxytocin in young children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Doctor of Clinical Psychology Candidates

Katherine (Kat) Crea - Longitudinal study into the mental health and emotional development in toddlers at high risk for Autism Spectrum Disorders by virtue of having an older sibling with the diagnosis.



Germaine Gergis - Language processing in children with high-functioning autism using eye-tracking technology.

Rebecca Kam - Investigating the effects of bilingual exposure on learning and development in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Rebecca McStay - A developmental perspective on family adaptation to a child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Nicole Porter - The impact of dual language exposure on language and communication in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Lisa Rumney - The effects of non-native language use on parent-child interaction style in dyads with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Doctor of Clinical Neuropsychology Candidates

Kavi Jayasinghe - Concept formation, repetitive and sensory behaviours, and stress-response in children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Masters of Clinical Psychology Candidates

Megan Clark - An investigation of school age outcomes of children diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder at 24 months.

Continued next page



Masters of Clinical Psychology Candidates

Mahwish Chaudry - A longitudinal investigation of developmental changes in pretend play in children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Natalie Mackay - Factors associated with educational placement for children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder during or following Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention (EIBI).

Stephanie Mertins - Diet and Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Honours Candidates in 2013

Suzana Cunha - Bilingualism and Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Sandra D'Souza - Predictors of outcomes in from age 2 to 4 years in children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Susana Medina - Sleep in Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Janette Rees - Emotional development and wellbeing in high-risk siblings of children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Veronica Rose - Visual attention and Key Word Sign acquisition in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Jacqueline Uren - Sleep and Psychopathology in Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Nicole Young - From Social Referencing to Social Learning.

Successful Completions in 2012 - 2013

PhD Candidates



Dr Cherie Green - Physical growth pattern in boys with an Autism Spectrum Disorder from birth to 16 years of age. Supervisors: Professor Cheryl Dissanayake and Dr Danuta Loesch.



Dr Leung with Professor Dissanayake

Dr Sarah Leung - Self-awareness, episodic and autobiographical memories and narrative skills in children with high functioning autistic disorder. Supervisors: Professor Cheryl Dissanayake and Professor Edith Bavin.

Continued next page

Doctor of Clinical Psychology Candidates



Dr Claire Forsyth - Investigating social cognition and attention deficits in 7 to 12-year-old children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Supervisors: Associate Professor Amanda Richdale and Professor Cheryl Dissanayake.

Honours Students 2012

Rebecca Consentino - Sleep and Executive Function in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Supervisor: Associate Professor Amanda Richdale.

Melissa Kate Duggan - Investigating the nature of pretend play in children with high-functioning Autism and typically developing control children. Supervisor: Professor Cheryl Dissanayake.

Robin Giles - Critical factors in a successful transition to higher education for students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Supervisor: Associate Professor Amanda Richdale.

Megan Grant - Early skills in toddlers with high-risk for ASD. Supervisor: Dr Kristelle Hudry.

Katrine Gunn - The social interaction and communication skills of pre-schoolers with autism and typically developing pre-schoolers. Supervisor: Dr Kristelle Hudry and Dr David Trembath.

Katherine Heier - From purposeful actions and language to social communication: The role of syntax in ASD. Supervisor: Dr Giacomo Vivanti.

Alexandra Mitchell - Developmental surveillance versus screening for the identification of Autism Spectrum Disorders in infants and toddlers. Supervisor: Dr Josephine Barbaro.

Emma Pezzotto - The pattern of emergence of Contagious Yawning (CY) in typically developing children. Supervisor: Dr Kristelle Hudry.

Evrin Ulusoy - The early markers of autism spectrum disorders. Supervisor: Dr Josephine Barbaro.

Objective 6

Foster knowledge transfer to practitioners within the field

We have again engaged in numerous activities throughout this year to transfer knowledge to practitioners in the field and to the community in general.



Online resource developed for tertiary students with ASD, their parents, and tertiary staff.

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale, in collaboration with **Project Officer Ru Cai**, has developed web-based information to support students with an ASD, as well as their parents and tertiary staff, to aid their transition to tertiary education. Responses to this resource, located at <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc/info/support>, have been very positive. The content of the webpages is not specific to La Trobe University and we are currently exploring options to make it available more widely. The development of this resource was funded by DHS.



ADOS Training with Dr Kristelle Hudry

January 21-25

Dr Kristelle Hudry ran a training course on the new Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS-2) for 11 trainees, including researchers, psychologists, and paediatricians.

The ADOS-2 provides a rigorous, evidence-based method of diagnosing an ASD. It evaluates an individual's social communication skills, play, creativity, and restricted/repetitive behaviours and interests. Clinicians and researchers need specialist training before using this tool. Dr Hudry also runs courses to update professionals trained on the last edition of ADOS (ADOS-G). Kristelle also offers supervision sessions for former trainees who wish to maintain their skills in reliable assessments.

For more information go to <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc/services/professional-training-and-development/ados-2-training-and-supervision>

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DSM-5 Forum and Webinar

We ran a free forum for professionals and parents in October 2012 to explain the changes in the diagnostic criteria for ASD to be published in the 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. The forum was very popular, with some 400 people attending and many more wanting to register. As a result we also ran a webinar on the topic in February 2013. Again, we were overwhelmed by the number of registrants. The webinar remains active and can be accessed at <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc/info/dsm-changes>.

At the forum, convened by **Professor Cheryl Dissanayake**, **Dr Giacomo Vivanti** presented a comprehensive summary of the history of the DSM, the changes in the 5th edition and OTARC's response to these changes. Invited guests, **Professor Nicole Rinehart**, then from Monash University, and **Dr Janine Manjiviona**, a community-based clinical psychologist, were also invited to outline their positions. All OTARC research staff contributed to the subsequent discussions and responded to questions from the floor.

2013 OTARC Research Forum

On July 26, 2013 we held a free whole-day forum for our research participants (parents/professionals/people with ASD) to tell them about our recent research findings and to introduce them to our staff and students. This forum was held in special recognition of the people who have already assisted in our research, and for those who are prepared to do so in the future.

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake gave the introductory address including some general information about research at OTARC. After that other OTARC staff and students presented some of their research projects and results. In the afternoon Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, Dr Giacomo Vivanti and Dr Cathy Marraffa from the Royal Children's Hospital, addressed some of the myths about ASD that are commonly talked about in the general population and the media. This was followed with a Question and Answer session in which all staff, as well as Dr Marraffa, participated. Judging from the audience participation in this and the other sessions, the interest in ASD research and the quest for answers is unabated.

The forum was attended by close to 200 registrants and was video-conferenced to the La Trobe Bendigo Campus. Social media (Facebook; Twitter) was used to share key messages throughout the day. We thank our students and staff, as well as the volunteers who assisted us to host this event.



Talks & Workshops

July 2012

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale, Ru Cai and Mary Collins (Chisholm TAFE) presented a workshop on Autism Spectrum Disorders for La Trobe University academic and non-academic staff. This workshop was part of a larger project on building online support for students when transitioning to tertiary studies funded by the Department of Human Services (VIC).

Dr Josephine Barbaro was selected to contribute to the Australian Academy of Sciences Theo Murphy High-Flyers Think Tank in Adelaide. The Think Tank was entitled 'Australia's population: Shaping a vision for our future'.

Dr Josephine Barbaro was invited to give a talk at the Maternal and Child Health Monthly Meeting in the Local Government Area of Port Phillip. The title of her talk was 'Research update on Autism Spectrum Disorders: DSM-5, Prevalence Rates, Risk Factors, and Developmental Surveillance'.

August 2012

Dr Josephine Barbaro was invited to give a talk at the Wangaratta Community of Practice. The title of her talk was 'Early Detection and diagnosis of ASDs in infancy, toddlerhood, and early childhood'.

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale presented a talk at Wesley College in Glen Waverley. Her topic was 'Why sleep is important: Promoting good sleep habits in your child'.

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale also gave a talk on 'Sleep and Autism Spectrum Disorders' for the Northern ASD Network.

Dr David Trembath gave a presentation on 'Introduction to Autism' to La Trobe University Education students at the Bundoora campus.

September 2012

Dr David Trembath gave a talk on 'Evidence Based Interventions for Individuals with ASD' to La Trobe University Speech Pathology students at the La Trobe Rural Health School, Bendigo.

Dr Kristelle Hudry ran an ADOS-2 course at OTARC with 10 trainees.

October 2012

Dr Kristelle Hudry gave a colloquium entitled 'Development of autism across infancy and toddlerhood' at Swinburne University, Hawthorn Campus.

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale gave a talk at Western Autistic School, Laverton campus entitled 'Sleep and children with an Autism spectrum disorder'.

November 2012

Ms Ru Cai and **Associate Professor Amanda Richdale** presented the findings from the DHS project on supporting tertiary students with an ASD at the Southern Higher Education Disability Network (SHEDN) at Monash University, Caulfield Campus.

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake presented two workshops for community-based professionals and a symposium for the Gunma Chapter of the Japanese Society for Clinical and Developmental Psychologists in Gunma Prefecture, Japan.

Workshop 1: 'Promoting the identification of Autism Spectrum Disorders in infancy and toddlerhood.'

Workshop 2: 'Early Intensive Behavioural Intervention for Autism Spectrum Disorders.'

Symposium: 'Early Identification and Intervention in Autism Spectrum Disorders.'

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December 2012

Dr Elfriede Ihsen gave a short presentation about OTARC at a Networking Morning organized by the Brimbank Community for Children and Brimbank Best Start.

January 2013

Dr Giacomo Vivanti and **Ms Kristy Capes** from the Margot Prior Wing presented a workshop on 'Implementation of the Early Start Denver Model in a group environment' at Bulleen Heights School.

March 2013

Rebecca Kam and **Dr Kristelle Hudry** spoke to the Chinese Parents' Special Net at Box Hill. This is a support group for parents of children with disability including ASD, and is part of the Chinese Community Social Services Centre. They talked about OTARC and specifically about their current project on Bilingualism and ASD.

Dr Giacomo Vivanti (by invitation from the Australian Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs - FACHSIA) gave a presentation on the changes to the diagnostic criteria in the DSM-5 to the Autism Advisor Forum in Adelaide, SA.

April 2013

Dr Kristelle Hudry presented a talk entitled 'Development in Autism across Infancy and Toddlerhood' at RMIT, Melbourne.

Dr David Trembath presented a seminar to staff and volunteers at the Victorian Office of the Public Advocate (Carlton) aimed at helping the volunteers do their work more effectively.

May 2013

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake gave a keynote address at the Southern Autistic School Parent Conference entitled 'Autism, where are we at in 2013?'

Dr Josephine Barbaro attended the Australian Academy of Sciences event, 'Science at the Shine Dome' in Canberra. She was nominated by Dr Chris Pakes, Associate Dean (Research), Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering, La Trobe University.

June 2013

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale and Ms Mary Collins (RMIT) presented a workshop 'Working with Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder' for staff at Deakin University.

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake was the invited speaker at the Autism Family Support Association AGM. She talked on 'Five years of Research and Service at The Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre'

Other Initiatives

Global knowledge transfer

As evident under Objective 2, our international work has increased dramatically over the last year, particularly in Asia. The increasing awareness of ASD and consequent needs internationally means that OTARC researchers receive numerous requests to travel to other countries to share our knowledge and expertise. As this also means increased opportunities for research, we have accepted this challenge which has served to extend our reach.

It is important to note that research in ASD is conducted on 10% of the world's population, mostly in Western countries. This limits our knowledge of this global phenomenon, especially its impact in different cultures. At OTARC we feel that it is incumbent on researchers to share knowledge to improve evidence-based practice in communities that are unable to access relevant literature due to a language barriers, often coupled with economic barriers.

Early Assessment Clinic for Autism Spectrum Disorders

Since its opening our Early Diagnostic Clinic for Autism Spectrum Disorders, now renamed Early Assessment Clinic for Autism Spectrum Disorders, has grown from strength to strength. Thanks to the generous donations from the R.E.Ross Trust, the William Buckland Foundation and the Phyllis Connor Memorial Trust we have begun to assess two children per week at the EAC. Dr Cherie Green, and Ms Katherine Pye have been appointed to carry out these assessments together with Dr David Trembath and Dr Josephine Barbaro. Katherine, who is a speech pathologist, also works at the Margot Prior Wing. In addition, we have welcomed a new intake officer, Dr Nancy Sadka, who has implemented several successful changes which have resulted in the intake process being streamlined and more convenient for families.

Seeing two families each week has resulted in a reduction of our waitlist from 6 months to 3 months. The mean age of children assessed at the clinic is 26.8 months (range 12 – 35 months), with 65% of referrals meeting criteria for an ASD (ratio: 3 boys to 1 girl). Nearly all of the remaining children have special needs, such as developmental and/or language delay, with less than 10% developing typically.

The Victorian Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre: The Margot Prior Wing



Work at the Margot Prior Wing is ongoing thanks to continuous funding by FaHCSIA, and to the team of dedicated staff headed by Mr Ed Duncan. Seven of nine key staff are fully trained to implement the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) with two others currently in training. A number of the centre's staff are also qualified ESDM trainers. The Margot Prior Wing has been undergoing site fidelity assessment with Professor Sally Rogers and Dr Cynthia Zierhut of the MIND Institute, UC Davis.

A total of approximately 30 families access this service, with our research indicating that the children are making very good progress. In addition to studying their progress, the majority of research undertaken with this cohort of children, focuses on how young children with ASD learn, and what factors predict their ability to learn.

There is a growing interest in the ESDM both locally and globally. The ESDM trainers at the Margot Prior Wing have presented a number of workshops over the past year on the ESDM, including a special trip to India in early 2013 (see <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/news/articles/2013/>

Continued next page

release/autism-researchers-travel-to-india) and Poland in May. Description of their work at the centre and elsewhere can be found on their new website <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/child/services/aselcc>.

Raising Children Network

OTARC staff are continuing to work with colleagues from the Parenting Research Centre to write and reviewing content for the Raising Children Network - Autism site. This year Dr David Trembath, Dr Elfriede Ihsen, Dr Giacomo Vivanti, Dr Naomi Bishop and especially Dr Cherie Green and Professor Cheryl Dissanayake have helped to ensure that the information is up-to-date, evidence-based and of a high standard.

World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD)

OTARC participated in WAAD with an information stand for AMAZE's Awareness Walk in Blue from the Alexandra Gardens to Birrarung Marr in Melbourne. Many of our staff and students completed the walk. It was good to meet many of the families we see at OTARC as well as getting to know prospective research participants and their families.



Cathy Bent and Heather Nuske enjoy a conversation with a parent at WAAD 2013.

Appointments

Congratulations to OTARC Director, Cheryl Dissanayake, who was promoted to full Professor in February. Professor Dissanayake has been an ASD researcher since 1984, when she began her PhD at Monash University. Following a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of California in Los Angeles, she returned to Melbourne to a lectureship in Developmental Psychology at La Trobe University, where she established an autism lab at the Child Development Unit. It was from this basis that she established OTARC following a foundation donation from Mrs Olga Tennison in 2007.

Her promotion reflects recognition of her contribution to the field of ASD over many years.

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake

- Co-Chair, La Trobe University Research Focus Area 'Understanding Disease' (June 2013-);
- Co-chair, Executive Committee of the Australasian Society for Autism Research (ASfAR) (December 2012-);
- Member, Strategic Advisory Committee of the Margot Prior Wing (2010 -);
- Convenor, Autism Victoria (Amaze) ASD Research Group (2003-);
- Member, Editorial Board of the Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist (2012-);
- Member, Editorial Board of Child Development Research (2011-);
- Member, Editorial Board of Frontiers in Developmental Psychology (2011-).

Dr Kristelle Hudry

- Member, AMAZE (Autism Victoria) Accreditation Board (2013-).

Continued next page



Appointments continued from previous page.

Dr Elfriede Ihsen

- Member, Planning Committee, Autism Education Association (2012).

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale

- Chair, EPIC Early Intervention Board of Management (2013-);
- Member, Committee for the APS Intellectual &/ or Developmental Disabilities and Psychology Interest Group (2012-);
- Member, Victorian Behaviour Support Services Practice Advisory Group (2012);
- Member, Editorial Board of Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders (continuing);
- Member, Autism Victoria (Amaze) ASD Research Group (continuing);
- Co-editor (with Associate Professor Kyle Johnson, Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, Oregon) of a new book *Advances in Autism: Sleep Disorders* (In preparation).

Dr David Trembath

- Member, Editorial Committee of the Journal of Clinical Practice in Speech-Language Pathology (2013-).

Dr Giacomo Vivanti

- Member, Editorial Board of the Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders (2013-);
- Scientific Consultant, Italian National Research Council Pervasive HealthCare Program (2012);
- Scientific Consultant, Italian Department of Health Committee to establish the Italian Guidelines on ASD Diagnosis and Treatment (continuing);
- Scientific Consultant, Autism Europe International Association for the Advancements of Rights of Persons with Autism (continuing);
- Scientific Consultant, Neuro-Engineering Group, University of Pisa, Italy (continuing);
- Scientific Consultant, Stella Maris Scientific Institute, University of Pisa, project on early diagnosis and predictors of treatment outcomes in the Tuscany region, Italy (continuing);
- Member, Editorial Board for *Autismo e Disturbi dello Sviluppo* (Italian journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders) (continuing);
- Member, Editorial Board for *Disabilita' e Disturbi dello Sviluppo* (Disability and Developmental Disorders) (continuing).

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OTARC Operations & Projects

During the last 12 months, OTARC has consolidated much of the development of infrastructure commenced in the first year.

The new database platform has been key to managing our news subscribers, volunteers, study participants and registrants to events. The platform has also been used to capture consultations by nurses in Maternal Child Health Care centres who are participating in our SACS-R project (Social Attention and Communication Study – Revised), which aims to identify early signs of ASD in infants and toddlers. This has helped families of at-risk children to be referred quickly to OTARC for a diagnostic assessment.

We have also changed the way we communicate our news, moving from a quarterly Newsletter in PDF or printed format to a dedicated blog with regular posts. The blog enables us to share our news more flexibly and regularly by integrating with social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. This also helps us to promote our studies for which we are seeking participants, as well as making our subscribers aware of our research findings and other developments related to ASD.

In addition, La Trobe's Curriculum Teaching and Learning Centre resources were made available by our Dean to host webinars and produce videos that focus on topical issues in the autism sector. To date we have interviewed Professors Margot Prior and Cheryl Dissanayake to get a snapshot of where autism research is at in Australia. Over time distinguished visiting researchers

will be interviewed on their thoughts, findings and experiences. La Trobe's Digital Marketing department has also helped us produce quality videos that introduce each of our key research themes.

OTARC took a more public role over the last 12 months engaging in important campaigns. "Worried about DSM changes" consisted of a public forum on campus and a national webinar about changes to the diagnostic criteria for ASD. Over 1000 people attended the forum/webinar showing that there is great community need to understand the changes. In refreshing some of our promotional material, we launched "AUTISM? Help Us find Answers" as a slogan to capture our Centre's work.

For much of the year we were engaged in the preparation for a free research forum for our research participants and their families. This forum was organised to thank our participants for supporting our research and to tell them about research outcomes. We used our communication platform to invite all participant families on our registry as well as those who participated in a recent study. We also invited new registrants to the forum and were thus able to grow our registry significantly. The forum took place 26 July at the Bundoora campus and was also streamed to the Bendigo campus.



The OTARC Lab Operations Project

We have continued to improve processes and procedures in our laboratory, spear headed by our Laboratory Manager, Carmela Germano, and our Senior Advisor – Operations and Projects, Wojciech Nadachowski. There were three main aims, to:

1. establish a set of effective policies and procedures for the Laboratory that ensure a stable, predictable, and secure environment for staff, students, volunteers, and participants;
2. improve management of research studies;
3. manage and maintain the integrity of the participant registry (database of participants);
 - improve communication with participants to ensure that they enjoy their engagement in our studies;
 - improve co-ordination of recruitment and retention of participants in research activities at the Centre.

To achieve these aims, we conducted two surveys, one of our students and staff to explore their needs for support, and one of the participants in our Participant Registry to receive understand their experience of taking part in our studies. These surveys assisted us to achieve our aims.

To address the first aim, a Laboratory Manual was created to familiarise all OTARC members with the OTARC laboratory operations. It contains:

- a set of guidelines to facilitate contact and relationship with participants;
- instructions for accessing our new online communication system;
- relevant privacy policies;
- a set of guidelines for students undertaking research (with their supervisor), including the design of a study, initiation of a research



proposal, preparing ethics documentation, recruitment and engagement of participants, preparation of a research thesis, preparation for conferences and publication of the results at the end of the study;

- details about resources held in the laboratory (assessment instruments, standard questionnaires, data collection and analysis tools);
- information about the day to day running of the laboratory.

To achieve the other two aims we have initiated a secure online database that stores participant records and study details. It allows us to:

- contact those participants who meet the selection criteria for a particular study;
- ensure that participants are not contacted too frequently;
- keep in contact with participants to inform them of study results and OTARC events of interest to them.

We acknowledge our Steering Committee who assisted us with this project: Professor Cheryl Dissanayake (Director, OTARC), Mr Cliff Picton (La Trobe University Ombudsman), Ms Paula Williamson (School of Psychological Science Executive Officer), Dr David Trembath (OTARC , Postdoctoral Fellow), Dr Nancy Sadka (parent from the Margot Prior Wing), and Ms Emma Baker (OTARC PhD candidate).

The Financial Report of the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre

For the Period Ending 30th June 2013

	Ending June 30 2013 Actual \$'000	Ending 30 June 2012 Actual \$'000	Ending 30 June 2011 Actual \$'000
Revenues			
Commonwealth Grants - DEEWR	0	21,703	42,201
State Government Grants	0	0	243,847
Research Revenue	63,549	83,498	127,280
Investment Revenue	<i>Interest on monies held</i>	46,481	102,754
Commercial Revenue	42,714	46,904	29,587
Other Grants and Donations	659,761	580,498	520,636
Other Revenue	0	21,960	12,379
Internal Revenue/Transfers	189,111	100,000	114,011
Total Revenue	1,001,616	957,317	1,168,184
Expenses			
Total Employee Benefits and on costs	995,534	825,637	446,440
Academic	670,098	626,685	379,149
Casual - Academic	281	281	57,051
General	114,167	114,167	34,125
Casual - General	83,921	83,921	32,846
Other salary related	-6,562	584	-56,730
Total Non Salary Expenditure	88,746	227,877	102,822
Infrastructure Related	<i>Maintenance, services</i>	12,507	20,217
Depreciation	11,546	10,581	6,790
Professional Fees	<i>Consultancies, etc</i>	13,412	13,113
Student Related	<i>Scholarships, Stipends, Training</i>	5,361	48,258
General Operating	<i>General Admin Costs</i>	13,664	14,724
Staff related	<i>Travel, Accommodation, Entertainment</i>	27,462	29,686
Financing costs	0	-8	0
Other Expenses Sundry Items	4,794	4,454	1,380
Internal Expense Transfers	0	86,854	-3,399
Total Expenses	1,084,280	1,053,514	549,262
Net Operating Result	-82,664	-96,198	618,922
Internal Transfers	0	0	-50,000
Underlying Operating Result	-82,664	-96,198	668,922

***1 Olga Tennison Balance as at 30th June 2013-
Reported in Cost Centre 9105**

LTU Foundation	(Fund 105831)	565,891
OTARC	(Fund 107159)	563,643
		1,129,534

*2 Fund Balances	634,661
Consolidated Balance	1,764,195

*** Notes**

1 > These are the balances from the Foundation Perpetual account as at end of June 2013.

2 > Olga Tennison Balance as 1 January 2013- Reported in Cost Centre 1618

Represents the current balance reported in SAP as at 1.1.2013. Following the implementation of the SAP Projects System the Centre is in the process of confirming transactions and balances. It is intended that these matters will be completed over the coming weeks.



Staffing and Centre Personnel

Staff

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, Director
Associate Professor Amanda Richdale, Principal Research Fellow
Dr Elfriede Ihnen, Research Fellow
Dr David Trembath, Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Dr Josephine Barbaro, Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Dr Giacomo Vivanti, Research Fellow, ASELCC/OTARC
Dr Kristelle Hudry, Lecturer, Developmental Psychology, School of Psychological Science
Mr Wojciech Nadachowski, Senior Advisor, Operations & Projects
Dr Cherie Green, Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Ms Katherine Pye, Speech Pathologist, Early Assessment Clinic (and Margot Prior Wing)
Ms Lisbeth Wilks, Administrative Officer
Ms Carmela Germano, Laboratory Manager
Mr Lachlan Burnside, IT Administration
Ms Irene Giaprakis, EDC Intake Officer (until December 2012)
Dr Nancy Sadka, EAC Intake Officer (from January 2013)

Academic Adjuncts

Dr Naomi Bishop, Department of Microbiology, La Trobe University
Dr Nusrat Ahmed, Director, Hope Centre, Bangladesh

Research Assistants

Ms Lindsay Pamment	Ms Ru Cai (until December 2012)
Ms Parise Gantikoglou (until December 2012)	Ms Megan Grant
Ms Veronica Rose	Ms Stefanie Dimov
Ms Kate Truman	

Honorary Members

Ms Amanda Golding, Amagol Consulting/Autism Noticeboard
Mr Eric Prugh, Exact Target
Mr Mike Burnside, Salesforce
Ms Jessica Stimson, We R Digital

Active Volunteers in 2012-2013

We currently have 90+ volunteers on our database willing to help in various capacities at OTARC. They contribute their knowledge and skills in data entry, event planning and managing, research support, and data verification.

Christina Antoniou	Jenny Bott	Sile Coleman
Matthew Digby	Joanne Ferraro	Parise Gantikoglou
Shakuntla Gondalia	Airlie Hamlyn	Peter Johansen
Ayesha Maharaj	Melanie Muniandy	Yogi Pratama Khosugi
	Evrin Ulusoy	

Governance - Advisory Committee



Professor Margot Prior (Chair), Adjunct Professor at La Trobe University, University of Melbourne University, and Royal Children's Hospital

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, OTARC Director, La Trobe University

Professor Tim Brown, DVC Research, La Trobe University (until December 2012).

Professor Keith Nugent, DVC Research, La Trobe University (from January 2013)

Professor Brian McGaw, Dean of Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering, La Trobe University

Professor David Finlay, Chair University Human Ethics Committee & Director, La Trobe University

Mr Clifford Picton, Ombudsman, La Trobe University

Professor Robin Williams, Director of Alumni and Advancement, Office of the Vice-Chancellor, La Trobe University (until April 2013)

Dr Alan Watkinson, Director of Alumni and Advancement, Office of the Vice-Chancellor, La Trobe University (from June 2013)

Dr Catherine Marraffa, Senior Paediatrician Developmental Medicine, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne

Mr Tony Stein, Asia Pacific Cloud Delivery Executive, IBM - Community Representative

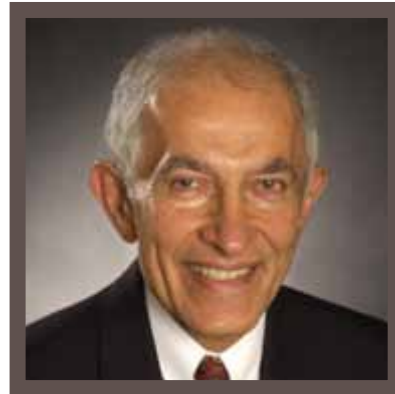
Ms Lia Castorini, Autism Victoria 'AMAZE'

Ms Emma Baker, PhD candidate, Student representative for OTARC, La Trobe University



The Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) was established in 2008 as a joint initiative of La Trobe University and Autism Victoria. This was made possible with a private donation by Mrs Olga Tennison in 2007. The Centre is named after her to acknowledge her generosity. Our mission within the Centre is to advance knowledge of the nature and causes of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs), as well as to develop and study evidence-based strategies for supporting children and families affected by an ASD.

OTARC is situated in the School of Psychological Science within the Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering (FSTE) at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia.



Our Patron is Professor David De Kretser (AC, AO, MD 1969, HonLLD 2006) Monash University. Professor Kretser was Governor of Victoria from 2006-2011.



Notes

