

Annual Report 2012

**The
Olga Tennison
Autism
Research
Centre**

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ANNUAL REPORT 2012

Introduction

At the completion of our fourth 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. And, as always, our gratitude is extended to our foundation donor, Mrs Olga Tennison, whose sustained generosity continues to support our work.

A highlight in the past year was that Professor David de Kretser, former Governor of Victoria (April 2006 – 2011), accepted our invitation to be Patron of the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre. We also welcomed Mr Wojciech Nadachowski as Senior Operations and Projects Advisor and he is helping to extend our reach and profile both within and outside of the University. One of his first activities was to plan and oversee a successful Strategic Planning Day: Towards 2015: Generosity in Spirit, Excellence in Research. Our focus was on where we want the OTARC to be in 2015, to examine how we are placed to get there, and what we need to do to achieve our goals.


We began 2012 with a very successful Round Table of Trusts and Foundations organized by the Office of Alumni and Advancement and Chaired by the Vice Chancellor, Prof John Dewar. The outcome of this successful morning was receipt of funding for the Early Diagnostic Clinic for Autism Spectrum Disorders that ensures its viability and expansion for a further two years. I would like to acknowledge the hard work of the clinic staff in ensuring the successful operation of this much needed community service.

Regular readers of our Newsletter will know that continued funding has also been received from the federal government for operation of the Margot Prior Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre, which allows the service to continue to offer evidence-based early intervention as well as high quality long-day care for young children with ASD and their families. This funding also allows for continuation of the excellent research being undertaken at the Margot Prior Wing, not only by our academic researchers and fellows, but also by our students.

We are hoping for a successful outcome on resubmission of the bid for a Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) for Living with ASDs which, despite being short-listed, was not funded last year. La Trobe University is, once again, one of 7 Universities in this \$104.6 million bid which also includes more than 30 end user organisations across Australia, and which is designed to undertake research to change the lived experience of ASDs from birth through adulthood.

We have had many distinguished visitors to the OTARC over the last year, and foremost amongst them were Professors David Amaral, Cathy Lord, and Rita Jordon. Our Centre continues to grow with over 40 staff and students, and 10 adjuncts/volunteers. I would like to acknowledge the dedication and creativity of each of them in contributing to our achievements over the past year. We outline these achievements and activities against our established objectives in this report, from the period of July 2011 to June 2012.

I would like to acknowledge and thank all our donors who continue to support our work. We also receive much encouragement and support from the Faculty and School, and indeed, the University as a whole. A sincere thank you to all members of our Advisory Committee, ably chaired by Professor Margot Prior, for their dedication and wise counsel throughout the year. Together, we take great pleasure in presenting this report on our progress at the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre to you.



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

Our Objectives and Achievements

Objective 1

Facilitate large and/or ongoing research projects

The current 'Research Themes and Projects' at the OTARC are outlined below, with details of some specific studies provided to illustrate our work over the last year. The increasing numbers of research projects at the centre continues to grow our reputation both nationally and internationally with our achievements realized in high impact journal publications, conference presentations and grants.

1. Identification and diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders

- a. Identifying early behavioural signs of Autism Spectrum Disorders in infancy and toddlerhood
- b. Identifying biological markers of Autism Spectrum Disorders

We continue to build on the Social Attention and Communication Study (SACS; Barbaro & Dissanayake, 2010), that was responsible for demonstrating successful identification of autism in infants and toddlers, by charting the development of this cohort of children further into childhood. The SACS has been translated into Korean and Polish, and is currently in use in these countries following training of early childhood professionals. We are also working on Japanese and Chinese translations, with Associate Professor Dissanayake due to travel to Japan later this year to provide training there. Dr Josephine Barbaro is currently designing the SACS-Revised to refine even further the ability of community-based professionals to identify ASDs with greater accuracy. Together with Dr Kristelle Hudry, and our collaboration with Dr Jordy Kaufman at Swinburne University investigating infant siblings of children with autism, we are deepening our understanding of the very early autism phenotype.

A recently completed PhD study at the Centre has confirmed that part of this early autism phenotype includes an increased growth rate of head circumference and height/stature, i.e. potential

biological markers. Although smaller at birth, not only are boys with autism growing at a faster rate than their typically developing peers but, as found by Ms Cherie Green, they are larger as a group by age 4-years, and remain larger through 16-years of age, despite a slowing of growth rate over this period. Children with ASD, as a group, also had different body to limb length ratios in comparison to typically developing children, suggesting some involvement of the connective tissue in their dysregulated growth. Of particular interest, Cherie identified a subsample of children with 'extreme' growth who also had the most severe symptoms of autism. This large research project has provided many clues for further investigation.

2. Behavioural and cognitive development and differences

- a. Comparative studies of Autism and Asperger's Disorders and gender differences in Autism Spectrum Disorders
- b. Understanding and interacting with the social world
- c. Pretend play

Another recently completed study by PhD candidate Rucha Joshe has indicated a lack of gender differences in the early development of children with an ASD from birth through to four years of age. Despite previous findings of gender differences in older children, young boys and girls with ASD appear to develop similarly in terms of early markers and autism symptoms and severity, their developmental and language profiles, and in their social attention and repetitive behaviours as observed in a structured setting. The use of different methodologies, such as standardized tests, interactive assessments, and detailed observational coding, did not result in identifying any gender differences. Thus the female profile of ASD appears to match the male profile, at least in early development, which has implications for early identification and diagnosis.

3. Related Conditions

- a. Sleep difficulties
- b. Mental health and wellbeing

A new longitudinal study, begun over the last year by Doctoral candidate, Kat Crea, under the supervision of Dr Kristelle Hudy, is focusing on the role of the child, family, and environmental factors in the development of mental health and emotional wellbeing in toddlers who are at high risk for ASDs, based on having an older sibling with this diagnosis. Although research has suggested that younger siblings of children with an ASD may be at increased risk of mental health difficulties, no study to date has investigated this issue in high-risk siblings under 3 years of age.

Language and communication

- a. Language processing
- b. Investigating the effectiveness of communication supports

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) strategies are commonly used to support the communication, learning, and participation of children, adolescents, and adults with an ASD. With the advent of devices such as smart phones and iPads, electronic speech generating devices (SGDs) are increasingly being used by parents, teachers, and therapists to support the communication needs of those with little or no functional speech. However, while there is a broad research literature examining the effectiveness of AACs, including SGDs, for children, adolescents, and adults who have complex communication needs, further research is needed to examine the specific outcomes for people with an ASD. The overall objective in this research program, led by Dr David Trembath, is to better understand the role AAC strategies may play in supporting the learning of children with an ASD. A variety of different approaches is being used in these studies at the OTARC, for example, by careful examination of visual attention to the modelling of AAC strategies

in simulated teaching situations, and by studying the effectiveness of a clinician administered SGD intervention for children with ASD with little or no functional speech.

4. Focus on families

- a. Family adaptation to living with Autism Spectrum Disorder
- b. Families as partners in service delivery

In a collaborative study, current doctoral candidate, Rebecca McStay and Associate Professor Dissanayake have been working with Dr Sander Begeer from the Netherlands on a Dutch dataset to investigate the role of child characteristics (age, autism severity, child quality of life, and problem behaviour) on parenting stress in parents of children and adolescents with high-functioning autism. Our findings indicated that the child's problem behaviours, in particular, hyperactivity, was the most important factor related to parenting stress, overruling other measures such as child age, autism severity and the child's quality of life. These results indicate the significant influence of problematic behaviours over and above the diagnosis of autism, on parenting demands and perceptions of parenting competence. Our findings are important in developing suitable interventions for the children and building supports for their parents.

5. Interventions across the lifespan

- a. Supporting evidence-based practice
- b. Effectiveness of early intervention
- c. Predictors of intervention outcomes
- d. Interventions in educational settings

The presence of the Margot Prior Wing on campus means that we now have a multitude of research projects focused on the early learning of children with autism. Key amongst the projects undertaken



here are those 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. Dr Giacomo Vivanti oversees this innovative research program, which has attracted many student projects. Dr Trembath has joined Dr Vivanti to extend this research to children with ASD in other early intervention settings. Also central to the research program here is the clinical evaluation of not only the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) of intervention being implemented within a group-based setting, but also the comparative evaluation of our program in relation to that undertaken at the other five Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centres around Australia. The OTARC has developed and maintains the database for the clinical evaluation data collected across the six centres. It is hoped that this evaluation will provide important new data, heretofore unavailable in Australia, on the developmental and psychosocial outcomes for children and their families who attend these centres.

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale has been focusing on older individuals by conducting a study on the transition process and supports for people with an ASD in tertiary education settings. Abla assisted by Ms Ru Cai, the findings from this study will inform the implementation of support programs designed to maximize the education outcomes for people with an ASD in tertiary settings. A peer online mentoring program and a website resource for tertiary education staff have been developed as part of the project funded by the Department of Human Services.

Reports

West, D., Johnson, H., Lyon, K., Iacono, T., & Trembath, D. (2012). Outcomes of the Non-Electronic Communication Aids Scheme (NECAS) for adults with Communication Difficulties. *SCOPE, Australia*.

Journal Publications

Barbaro, J., & Dissanayake, C. (2012). Early markers of Autism Spectrum Disorders in infants and toddlers prospectively identified in the Social Attention and Communication Study (SACS). *Autism*; DOI DOI: 10.1177/1362361312442597

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*. DOI 10.1007/s10803-012-1441-z

Falkmer, M., Stuart, G.W., Danielsson, H., Bram, S., Lönebrink, M., & Falkmer, T. (2011). Visual acuity in adults with Asperger syndrome: No evidence for "eagle-eyed" vision. *Biological Psychiatry*, 70, 812-816.

Goldman, S. E., Richdale, A. L., Clemens, T., & Malow B. A. (2011). Parental sleep concerns in Autism Spectrum Disorders: Variations from childhood to adolescence. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*; DOI 10.1007/s10803-011-1270-5

Leekam, S., Prior, M., & Uljarovic, M. (2011). Restricted and repetitive behaviors in Autism Spectrum Disorders: A review of research in the last decade. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137, 4, 562-593

Murphy, A., Trembath, D., Arciuli, J., & Roberts, J. M. (2011). Supporting parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders to become informed consumers of evidence on speech pathology practice. *Evidence-Based Communication Assessment and Intervention*, 5, 116-129

Schreck, K. A. & Richdale, A. L. (2011). Knowledge of childhood sleep: A possible variable in under or misdiagnosis of childhood sleep problems. *Journal of Sleep Research*, 20: 589–597.

Tee, J., & Dissanayake, C. (2011). Can 15-month-old infants understand pretence? An investigation using the 'violation-of-expectation' paradigm. *Acta Psychologica*, 138, 316-321.

Veness, C., Prior, M., Bavin, E., Eadie, P., Cini, E. & Reilly, S. (2011). Early indicators of Autism Spectrum Disorders at 12 and 24 months of age: A prospective, longitudinal comparative study. *Autism*. DOI: 10.1177/1362361311399936

Vivanti, G., Manzi, B., & Curatolo, P. (2011). An Italian prospective study of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: can early treatment change the outcome? *Autism Open Access*, 1:102.

Schreck, K. A., & Richdale, A. L. (2011). Knowledge of childhood sleep: A possible variable in under or misdiagnosis of childhood sleep problems. *Journal of Sleep Research*, 20, 598-597

Goldman, S. E., Richdale, A. L., Clemens, T., & Malow B. A. (2012). Parental sleep concerns in autism spectrum disorders: Variations from childhood to adolescence, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 42, 531-538.

In print

Dissanayake, C., (2012, June). The trouble with autism: Delays in early identification and diagnosis, *InPsych*, 6-7.

In Press

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

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

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, in press). Infant neural sensitivity to dynamic eye gaze is associated with later emerging autism. *Current Biology*.

Trembath, D., Germano, C., Johanson, G., & Dissanayake, C. (2012, in press) The experience of anxiety in young adults with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*.

Jacobs, D., & Richdale, A. (In press). Language and literacy subtypes in young children with a high functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder. In: Communication in Autism. Arciuli, J. & Brock, J. (Eds.). Trends in Language Acquisition Research series (TiLAR). John Benjamins Publishing: Amsterdam.

Book Chapters

Vivanti, G., & Congiu, S. (2012). La comprensione del linguaggio nell'autismo. In Levi, G. (ed) *lavorare con gli autismi*. Armando Editore, Rome, Italy.

Dissanayake, C. (2012, in press). Social behavior and social impairment. *Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders* (Ed. Volkmar, F). Springer

On line

Vivanti, G. (2011). The Social Nature of Human Cognition: lessons from Autism. *Mnemosyne, Memo Press*. <http://mnemopress.com/mmwp/2011/07/lessons-autism/>

Vivanti, G. (2011). Actions, Gazing and Autism. *City University of New York, How Babies Learn Blog*.

These and other publications are available on the OTARC Publications webpage. Many of the Abstracts on these studies are also linked to this web page.



Conferences (in chronological order)

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

June 2011

Jacobs, D. & Richdale, A. Behavioural diversity in children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI). Paper presented at the Speech Pathology Australia National Conference.

July 2011

Badenoch, R. & **Richdale, A.** Authentic school-home partnership: Blending roles in the educative process. Paper presented at the 7th International Conference on Education (ICE) at Samos Island, Greece.

Dissanayake, C. Pretend Play in young children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder: Evidence for symbolic abilities. Keynote at Play Conference, University of Melbourne.

Dissanayake, C. An investigation of social attention in the development of Autism. The Australasian Human Development Association (ADHA), Biennial Meeting, Dunedin, .New Zealand.

Dissanayake, C. Theory of mind in high-functioning Autism in middle childhood. The Australasian Human Development Association (ADHA), Biennial Meeting, Dunedin, .New Zealand.

Vivanti, G. Children with Autism's responses to direct gaze during imitation tasks. The Australasian Human Development Association (ADHA), Biennial Meeting, Dunedin, .New Zealand.

September 2011

Barbaro, J. & Dissanayake, C. Prospective identification of ASDs in infants and toddlers using developmental surveillance approach: The Social Attention and Communication Study (SACS). Australasian Pacific Autism Conference (APAC), Perth.

Bland, S., Richdale, A., & Rose, A. An evaluation of the 'drama for everyday life' program for children and adolescents with High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder. (poster) Australasian Pacific Autism Conference (APAC), Perth.

Bishop, N. Characterisation of a new gene family implicated in Autism: The DIA1-family. Australasian Pacific Autism Conference (APAC), Perth.

Chandler, F. & Dissanayake, C. An exploration of the internal working models of caregiver attachment in children with high functioning Autistic Disorder. Australasian Pacific Autism Conference (APAC), Perth.

Dissanayake, C., Bent, C. & Barbaro, J. An investigation of social attention in the development of Autism. Australasian Pacific Autism Conference (APAC), Perth.

Richdale, A., Baker, E. Short, M. & Gradisar, M., Associations between sleep and psychopathology in adolescents with high functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HFASD). Australasian Pacific Autism Conference (APAC), Perth.

Vivanti, G., et al Sensitivity to direct gaze in Autism and typical development. Australasian Pacific Autism Conference (APAC), Perth.

Zierhut, C., & Vivanti, G. Treatment gains in children receiving the Early Start Denver Model in a group setting (poster) Australasian Pacific Autism Conference (APAC), Perth.

November, 2011

Aziz, A., Karmi, T. & **Bishop, N.** A novel candidate-gene for autism in individuals with 18q deletion syndrome (Poster). Autism Victoria/Amaze 2011 Autism Spectrum Disorder Research Forum, Melbourne.

Bishop, N. An expanding gene family implicated in autism: The DIA1-family (Poster) Autism Victoria/Amaze 2011 Autism Spectrum Disorder Research Forum, Melbourne.

Dissanayake, C., Chandler, F. & Newbiggin, A. Theory of mind in high-functioning autism in middle childhood (Poster). Autism Victoria/Amaze 2011 Autism Spectrum Disorder Research Forum, Melbourne

Green, C., Dissanayake, C. & Loesch, D. 2D:4D digit ratio and autism severity in boys. Autism Victoria/Amaze 2011 Autism Spectrum Disorder Research Forum, Melbourne.

Karmi, T., Aziz, A. & **Bishop, N.** Investigating the role of DIAF18-related genes in autism and mental retardation (Poster). Autism Victoria/Amaze 2011 Autism Spectrum Disorder Research Forum, Melbourne.

Richdale, A., Baker, E., Short, M. & Gradisar, M. Associations between sleep and psychopathology in adolescents with high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HFASD) (Poster). Autism Victoria/Amaze 2011 Autism Spectrum Disorder Research Forum, Melbourne.

Vivanti, G. Social learning in autism: A prospective cohort study. Autism Victoria/Amaze 2011 Autism Spectrum Disorder Research Forum, Melbourne.

Zierhut, C. & Vivanti, G. Progress in children receiving the Early Start Denver Model treatment approach in a group setting: Individual trajectories. Autism Victoria/Amaze 2011 Autism Spectrum Disorder Research Forum, Melbourne.

Bland, S., Richdale, A. & Rose, A. "Every Day Life" program for children and adolescents with high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (Poster). Autism Victoria/Amaze 2011 Autism Spectrum Disorder Research Forum, Melbourne.

Dissanayake, C., Newbiggin, A. & Chandler, F. Emotion understanding and empathic responsiveness in high-functioning children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Poster). Autism Victoria/Amaze 2011 Autism Spectrum Disorder Research Forum, Melbourne.

Baker, E., Richdale, A., Short, M. & Gradisar, M., Sleep patterns in adolescents with high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder and typically developing adolescents Autism Victoria/Amaze 2011 Autism Spectrum Disorder Research Forum, Melbourne.

Barbaro, J. & Dissanayake, C., Developmental profiles of infants and toddlers with ASD identified prospectively in a community-based setting (Poster). Autism Victoria/Amaze 2011 Autism Spectrum Disorder Research Forum, Melbourne.

December 2011

'Exploring Social Cognition: Perspectives from Psychology, Philosophy, and Neuroscience' - Social-Cognition Workshop, La Trobe University.

Vivanti, G., From purposeful actions to social cognition: the case of Autism.

Reynolds, J. 'Body-reading' before 'mind-reading'? Inter-Subjectivity and the centrality of non-inferential perception of others.

Dissanayake, C., Presenting the social developmental perspective on social cognition.

Zamuner, E. A theory of affect perception.

Hohwy, J. Sensory Integration in Autism.

Hudry, K. Parent-child interaction in the context of emerging autism.

Continued next page



January 2012

Vivanti, G. Neurocognitive underpinnings of learning difficulties in autism. BioAutism 2012 Conference, Brisbane.

Bishop, N. An expanding gene family implicated in autism spectrum disorder. BioAutism 2012 Conference, Brisbane.

April 2012

Vivanti, G. & Zeirhut, C. Efficacy of the Early Start Denver Model in Community Childcare: 12-Month Outcomes. ABA Today: Effective, Evidenced and Evolved, Melbourne.

March 2012

Vivanti, G. Early Start Denver Model in a group setting. The International Conference of Neurobiology, Diagnosis, and Treatment of Autism. Rapallo, Italy.

May 2012

Posters

Trembath, D., Iacono, T. & Caithness, T. The effectiveness of speech generating devices for children with ASD. The International Meeting for Autism Research 2012, Toronto, Canada.

Vivanti, G., Zierhut, C., Dissanayake, C. & the Victorian ASELCC team, Social and non-social abilities are differentially associated to treatment gains in different domains. The International Meeting for Autism Research 2012, Toronto, Canada.

Barbaro, J. & Dissanayake, C. Diagnostic stability of Autism Spectrum Disorders and predictors of crossover in toddlers prospectively identified in a community-based setting. The International Meeting for Autism Research 2012, Toronto, Canada.

Joshi, R. & Dissanayake, C. Gender differences in Autism Spectrum Disorder: Early markers, autism manifestations and cognitive development from birth to preschool age. The International Meeting for Autism Research 2012, Toronto, Canada.

Hudry, K. & Pamment, L. Community service providers' views and experiences regarding bilingualism and autism. The International Meeting for Autism Research 2012, Toronto, Canada.

Gergis, G. & Bavin, E., Semantic priming in children with high-functioning Autism: An eye-tracking study. The International Meeting for Autism Research 2012, Toronto, Canada.

Ahmed, N. Y. & Richdale, A. L. Intervention focussing on the interaction styles of parents and therapists of children with Autism and limited speech: Case studies from Bangladesh. The International Meeting for Autism Research 2012, Toronto, Canada.

Cai, R. Y., Richdale, A. L. & Dissanayake, C. An assessment of the needs of tertiary education students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The International Meeting for Autism Research 2012, Toronto, Canada

IMFAR Sleep Special Interest Group

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale co-chaired the Sleep Special Interest Group with Prof Beth Malow from Vanderbilt University and **Ms Emma Baker** presented her PhD proposal at the Sleep SIG data blitz and helped with the organisation of this Special Interest Group (SIG)

Papers

Richdale, A. R. Scientific Panel: Lullaby and good night or tomorrow is gonna be a tough day: Paper 3, Research predictions for the influence of disturbed sleep and what we can do. The International Meeting for Autism Research 2012, Toronto, Canada.

Richdale, A. R., Baker, E., Short, M. & Gradisar, M. Sleep, anxiety and depression in high-functioning adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder (HFASD). The International Meeting for Autism Research 2012, Toronto, Canada.



June 2012

Tan, X. Y., Trembath, D., Bloomberg, K., **Iacono, T., & Caithness, T.** A pilot study of Key Word Signing for non-speaking children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Speech Pathology Australia National Conference, June 25-27, Hobart, Australia.

Trembath, D., Iacono, T., West, D., & Lyon, K. Augmentative communication supports for adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Speech Pathology Australia National Conference, June 25-27, Hobart, Australia.

Cheung, G., **Trembath, D.,** Arciuli, J., & Togher, L. The influence of workplace factors on evidence-based speech pathology practice for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Speech Pathology Australia National Conference, June 25-27, Hobart, Australia.

Smith, M., Joffe, B., & **Trembath, D.** Effects of the structured use of music and movement on response contingency, and syntactic and semantic diversity in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Speech Pathology Australia National Conference, June 25-27, Hobart, Australia.

Grants

Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering (FSTE) Researcher Grant (2010-2011); Dissanayake, C., & Trembath, D: Speech Generative Devices for Non-Speaking Children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

DHS Disability Grant (2010-2011); Richdale, A., & Dissanayake, C: Transition to, and Participation in Tertiary Education for Students with an ASD.

SPOTonDD Research Grant (2010-2011); Trembath, D., Dissanayake, C., Richdale, A., Iacono, T. and Togher, L: Practice is Research: The use of single case experimental designs in Clinical Practice, Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, and Physiotherapists on Developmental Disability.

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

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

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

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) (2011); Dissanayake, C., Trembath, D., Nadachowski, W.: Child and Family - Outcomes Strategy Database for the Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centres.

Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering (FSTE) Early Career Researcher award 2011; Dr Kristelle Hudry: Early Parent-Child Interaction in the Context of High Genetic Risk for Autism.

Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering (FSTE) Early Career Researcher award 2011;

Trembath, D: A pilot comparison of electronic and non-electronic communication aids for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

R E Ross Trust (2011-2013); Dissanayake, C. and the EDC Team: Early Diagnostic Clinic for ASDs.

Inaugural Phylliss Connor Grant (2012); Dissanayake, C. and the EDC Team: Early Diagnostic Clinic for ASDs

The William Buckland Foundation (2012-2014); Dissanayake, C. and the EDC Team: Early Diagnostic Clinic for ASDs.

Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering (FSTE) Early Career Researcher award 2012; Barbaro, J.: 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.

The Menzies Allied Health Start Up Grant (2012); Barbaro, J. 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.

The Apex Foundation Trust for Autism (2012); Baker, E.: Circadian Rhythm Dysfunction in Adults with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder: Evidence from Dim-Light Melatonin Onset.

Visiting Fellowships

Small Grants Program for La Trobe Research Exchanges with China (2011); Associate Professor Chonying Wang, Director of the Center for Behavioural Science at Nankai University.

Endeavour Awards Program (2011); Dr Sander Begeer, VU University Amsterdam.

Accolades for Josie!

Dr Josephine Barbaro was selected by the Australian Academy of Science to participate in the 2012 Theo Murphy High Flyers Think Tank entitled Australia's population: Shaping a vision for our future, to be held in Adelaide on 26-27 July 2012. The Theo Murphy (Australia) Fund will sponsor Josie's attendance at the Think Tank.

Josie was also awarded the La Trobe University Nancy Millis PhD Prize, and is the recipient of the International Society for Autism Research Dissertation Award 2012, which she accepted at the International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) in Toronto in May (*see photo right*). The Social Attention and Communication Study, supervised by Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, has received much national and international attention, including media pieces in newspapers and on TV, but this is by far the most significant recognition of this important work from the pre-eminent research society for ASDs in the world.



Dr Josephine Barbaro (second from left) received her dissertation at IMFAR with other recipients. The President of INSAR, Professor Helen Tager-flusberg is on the left,

OTARC Lab and Research Seminar Meetings

All members of the OTARC meet fortnightly. These meetings comprise a monthly research seminar (Chaired by the Director) and monthly laboratory meeting (Chaired by the Lab Manager). These meetings of all team members allow us to discuss the most recent research as well as our ongoing work and research needs. A formal staff meeting follows the monthly lab meeting, and the staff frequently meet informally as well to share their research ideas and directions, and to foster our collaborative research initiatives.

Objective 2

Facilitate collaboration with other research centres both nationally and internationally

As our reputation grows, so do our national and international research collaborations. We also receive many requests by visiting scholars to spend time at the Centre, and thus host many national and international visitors. These activities ensure that the Centre is a vibrant place for its staff and students who benefit greatly from these collaborations and visitors.

Collaborations

International

Dr Nusrat Yasmeen Ahmed, Flinders University & Director of the Hope Autism Center in Bangladesh

Dr Sander Begeer, Developmental Psychology, VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands

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

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

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

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 Suzanne Goldman, Kennedy Center, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, USA

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

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

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

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

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

Dr Emiko Kesuka, Gunma Prefectural Women's University, Japan

National

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

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 Evan Kidd, Department of Psychology, Australian National University, Canberra

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

Dr Mark Neilsen, Department of Psychology, University of Queensland

Associate Professor Leanne Togher, Senior National Health and Medical Research Council Research Fellow, University of Sydney

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

Victorian

Associate Professor Graeme Johanson, Director, Centre for Community Networking Research, Monash University

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

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

Associate Professor Rajiv Khosla, Director of the Business Systems and Knowledge Modelling Lab, La Trobe University

Associate Professor Shonali Krishnaswamy, Deputy Director, Centre for Distributed Systems and Software Engineering, Monash University

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

Dr Danuta Loesch, Senior Research Fellow, School of Psychological Science, La Trobe University

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

Ms Katie Lyon, Speech and Language Pathologist, SCOPE Victoria, Communication Resource Centre

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

Ms Gloria Staios & Ms Christine Kendall, Speech and Language Pathologists, Western Autistic School and Spectrum Speech, Victoria

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

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

Ms Denise West, Manager, SCOPE Victoria, Communication Resource Centre

Partnerships

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

Collaboration Highlights

In July 2011, Dr Kristelle Hudry spent a few weeks in the UK where she visited a number of different research groups:

- The Wales Autism Research Centre - meetings with the Chair of Autism, Professor Sue Leekam and her staff,
- Birkbeck College and the Institute of Education - meetings with the British Autism Study of Infant Siblings (BASIS) research group
- Guy's Hospital and the University of Manchester - meeting the Preschool Autism Communication Trial (PACT) research group.



The PACT research group: (Left to Right.) Prof Ann Le Couteur, Prof Pat Howlin, Dr Vicky Slonims and Dr Kristelle Hudry



Visitors on Study Leave

Dr Emiko Kezuka, visited OTARC again in 2011. She has been working on joint attention in infants with an ASD while here. She is from Gunma Prefectural Women's University in Japan.

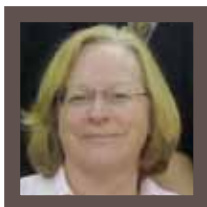
International Visitors

Dr Jose Ignacio Alcantara, a visiting scholar from the Department of Experimental Psychology at the University of Cambridge, attended our August 2011 OTARC Seminar to present a talk 'Possible mechanisms underlying speech-in-noise perception deficits in ASD.'



Professor David Amaral, Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, Research Director and Beneto Foundation Chair, The M.I.N.D. Institute, University of California, Davis

and Past President of INFAR visited the OTARC and the Margot Prior Wing in September 2011. He gave a public lecture at La Trobe University which was fully subscribed with an excess of 260 attendees. The lecture was titled 'Neurobiological and Neuroimmune Approaches to Understanding Autism'.



Professor Cathy Lord from the Department of Psychology at the University of Michigan, USA, and currently in New York at a joint position at Columbia and Cornell Universities, visited OTARC and the Margot Prior

Wing in September 2011 when she met with both staff and students.

Associate Professor Chongying Wang, Director of the Centre of Behavioural Studies at the University of Tianjin, China visited OTACR in November 2011.

Professor John McEachin, Founder of Autism Partnership and leading authority on Applied Behaviour Analysis visited us to discuss research collaborations.

Dr Joanna Kwasińska, an academic speech pathologist from the Warsaw Academy of Special Education and a clinician from Therapy Centre Adesse in Poland visited OTARC and the Margot Prior Wing in January 2011 to train on the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) with Dr Zierhut.

Dr Sebastian Gaigg, City University, London, UK visited OTARC in April 2011 when he came to Australia to co-train on the ADOS with Dr Hurdry. He presented a talk on 'The interplay of emotion and cognition in Autism Spectrum Disorder'.

Dr Sander Begeer visited the OTARC on an Endeavour award and presented a talk in our research seminar: 'Assessment and treatment of empathy in autism'. Dr Begeer is an Assistant Professor in Developmental Psychology at VU University Amsterdam.

Professor Rita Jordan, Emeritus Professor in Autism Studies: Autism Centre for Education & Research, The School of Education, The University of Birmingham, UK visited OTARC and the Margot Prior Wing while she was in Melbourne in June 2012.

National Visitors

Visitors from ABIA and Learning 4 Life

Mary Muirhead – Director Learning for Life (L4life) and Autism Behavioural Intervention Association (ABIA) Committee of Management Member

Mary Christian – Committee of Management member L4life/Research

Sarah Wood – Senior program staff member and Research Officer at L4life

Karen Mc Kinnon – Director, Autism Partnership Australia

Susie Pavey – General Manager, ABIA

Christine Stocco - Autism Partnership Australia

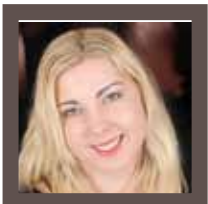
Objective 3

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



The OTARC has continued to support the development of the Australasian Society for Autism Research (ASfAR), with the inaugural meeting held at the conclusion of the APAC meeting in Perth, September 2011. An interim committee meeting was formed with membership of this fledgling society now at 70+. More information about this society is available at: australasiansocietyforautismresearch.wordpress.com/. Election of an Executive Committee is due to take place shortly, and the inaugural research conference of the ASfAR will be held at Macquarie University, December 6-7, 2012.

The Olga Tennison PhD Scholarship



We have continued to support Ms Nicole Grant, the current Olga Tennison PhD Scholarship candidate at the School of Occupational Therapy, University of Queensland

(Supervisors: Professor Sylvia Rodger and Associate Professor Tammy Hoffmann). Her project title is: 'Assisting parents of children with autism to make intervention decisions by improving their health literacy about evidence.'



As noted in the introduction, we have been centrally involved with the resubmission of the application for the Co-operative Research Centre (CRC) for Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Despite the application being short-listed last year, it was unsuccessful. We continue to have the same shared vision in our re-submission to enable earlier, more accurate and efficient diagnoses, and to find more effective and cost efficient ways of enabling children and adults with ASD to achieve valued educational and life outcomes through an end-user driven, cooperative, public-private national CRC. If successful, the CRC will bring together key autism researchers across Australia in an 8-year, multi-million dollar initiative designed to improve the lives of people with an ASD, and to advance our understanding of this complex body of neuro-developmental disorders, which affect 1% of the population. This year, the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) supported our bid, with the Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers, Senator Jan McLucas, announcing that the Australian Government will commit \$300,000 for research to underpin the bid to establish the CRC. We have already begun this research at the OTARC, working closely with Professor Valsa Eapen at the University of New South Wales to identify cognitive and social communication ASD Subtypes.

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 need for and profile of autism research in the community. We use the print, radio and television media where possible, including social media, to extend our reach.

We have 575 friends on FACEBOOK, and many followers on Twitter (individuals and organisations) who, in turn, reach out to many thousands of other followers! We averaged approximately 500 visits each month to our Centre website (www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc) over the last year, and have in excess of 2000 contacts on our email list. We have approximately 500 'Friends of OTARC'.

All our contacts receive our quarterly newsletter 'Another Piece'. We have upgraded the Newsletter this year which is now distributed in a different format (Blog postings) using a communications tool called 'Exact Target'.

To raise awareness of individual members of our Centre, we have a 'WHO's WHO @ OTARC in 2012' which is available as a downloadable pdf document from our website.

Media Activity

August 29, 2011 - **Dr Naomi Bishop**, Research, Letter to the Editor published in The Melbourne Age on p10, entitled 'Cost comes later'

September 2011 - **Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake** was interviewed on SBS Turkish Radio

September 2011 - **Dr Giacomo Vivanti** was interviewed for the Italian newspaper "La Nuova Sardegna"

October 2011 - **The OTARC** was referred to in the Sunday Magazine of The Herald Sun.

November 24, 2011 - ABC Science website: Genetic mutations clue to autism drugs by Helen Carter, ABC journalist— **Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake** was interviewed about this article.

December 2011 - An article about the **Margot Prior Wing at the ASELCC** was published in La Trobe University's SYNERGY magazine.

January 14, 2012— The Weekend Australian— **Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake** was interviewed for an article entitled 'Kids with autism need cash injection',

January 27, 2012 —The British Autism Study of Infant Siblings (BASIS) received wide media coverage in January, as did **Dr Kristelle Hudry** who is part of this team.



February, 18, 2012—SBS Radio – **Dr Giacomo Vivanti** spoke about Asperger's syndrome for Asperger's International Day (in Italian).

March 19, 2012—Channel 9, A Current Affair— **Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake** took part in the Autism Forum

April 16, 2012 - New York Times ran an article about "Schreck, K. A., & **Richdale, A. L.** (2011). Knowledge of childhood sleep: A possible variable in under or misdiagnosis of childhood sleep problems. *Journal of Sleep Research*, 20, 598-597"

April 23, 2012 - Education Age ran a similar article to the New York Times article (see above) and the same research was also posted on the following website: "http://www.healthcanal.com/child-health/27486-How-well-does-your-child-sleep.html"

April – Whittlesea Leader
Progress Leader
La Trobe University Bulletin Winter Issue
- **Mrs Olga Tennison** Honorary Grandmother of ASELCC

June 25, 2012 - 2CC Canberra, Drive program with Mike Welsh interviewed **Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake**

June 26, 2012 - ABC One- Radio interview by Sonia Faleiro with **Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake**

June 26, 2012 - Morning Program, ABC Radio, Mt. Gambier SA, Stan Thomson interviewed **Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake**

'Honorary Gran' fights for better child autism services

April 5, 2012



The best 'medicine' is early identification and early intervention – and too many children are not getting it. Olga Tennison – one of

Australia's most generous benefactors for research into Autism Spectrum Disorders – has been made 'honorary grandmother' to some 20 children with autism. Based at La Trobe University in Melbourne, they are the... *[Read more...]*

Tagged: *Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Cheryl Dissanayake, La Trobe University, Margot Prior Wing, Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre, World Autism Awareness*

Posted in: *People, Psychology, Public Health, Research, Winter Issue 2012*



Donations

A total of \$580,498 was received in donations (see financial statement on page 29)

Organisations

Kalparrin EIP
Casconsult Pty Ltd, Consulting engineers, mediators and arbitrators, Clifton Hill

Individuals

Olga Tennison
Beryl E. McKenzie
John & Fay Aitken
Tiffanie Lukey
Vicki & David Potter
Lucinda Balcombe Quick
Wendy Kozica
Joanne Forrest
An anonymous donor

Actively fundraising

Anyone now can help fundraise for OTARC in a variety of events offered through EVERYDAY HERO. To find out more go to <http://www.everydayhero.com.au/charity/view?charity=1648> to help fund research into Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Objective 5

Provide opportunities for student based research and early career mentoring programs

We currently have 25 students (Honours, Masters, Doctoral, and PhD candidates) undertaking their research at the centre.

Postgraduate students

PhD Candidates

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

Cherie Green: A mixed longitudinal study of growth in boys with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Rucha Joshi: A longitudinal study of gender differences in the early development of girls and boys with ASD from infancy to their early childhood years

Sarah Leung: Memory, narratives and the self in children with high-functioning Autism.

Heather Nuske: Emotional reactivity (facial, pupillary), emotional expressivity and learning from emotions in young children with Autism (aged 2-5) 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: The mental health and wellbeing of toddlers who have a sibling with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Claire Forsythe: Investigating social attention in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Germaine Gergis: Language processing in children with high-functioning Autism using eye-tracking.

Rebecca Kam: Investigating parent-child interaction and exploring the implications it has on the development of children with and without Autism.

Rebecca McStay: An investigation of caregiver wellbeing across childhood.

Doctor of Clinical Neuropsychology Candidates

Kavi Jayasinghe: Sensory symptoms and repetitive behaviours in Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Masters of Clinical Psychology Candidates

Mahwish Chaudry: Investigating developmental changes in pretend play in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Natalie Mackay: Outcomes for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) 12 months following Early Intensive Behaviour Intervention (EIBI).

Nicole Porter: The potential effects of bilingualism on parent-child interaction and communication for families of children with Autism.

Lisa Rumney: The potential effects of bilingualism on maternal synchrony in families of children with Autism.



Honours Candidates

Rebecca Consentino: Sleep and executive function in children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Melissa Duggan: Investigating the nature of pretend play in children with high-functioning Autism and typically developing children.

Robin Giles: Transition to tertiary studies for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Megan Grant: Early skills in toddlers at high-risk for ASD.

Katrine Gunn: The social interaction and communication skills of pre-schoolers with autism and typically development.

Katherine Heier: From purposeful actions and language to social communication: The role of syntax in ASD.

Alexandra Mitchell: Developmental surveillance versus screening for the identification of Autism Spectrum Disorders in infants and toddlers.

Emma Pezzotto: The pattern of emergence of Contagious Yawning (CY) in typically developing children.

Evrin Ulusoy: The early markers of Autism Spectrum Disorders

Successful Completions in 2011 - 2012

Doctor of Clinical Psychology Graduates



Dr Jessica Mifsud: A comparative investigation of symbolic play competency in children with high-functioning autism' (Supervisor: Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake).

Dr Amanda Newbiggin: Self-perception, social understanding and social responsiveness in children with high functioning autism from the perspectives of 'self' and 'other' (Supervisor: Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake).

Masters of Clinical Psychology Graduate

Clare James: Targeting sleep problems in children with autism with behavioural interventions (Supervisor: Associate Professor Amanda Richdale)

Honours

Parise Nichole Genticoglou: Examining how sleep problems in children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) affect mother's sleep and well-being (Supervisor: Associate Professor Amanda Richdale)

Michelle Smith: Music and movement based treatment for children with ASD (Supervisor: Dr David Trembath)

Xuet Ying Tan: Key word signing for children with ASD (Supervisor: Dr David Trembath)



Dr David Trembath congratulates a very happy Xuet and her family after her graduation.

Achievements

Dr David Trembath's honours students, Xuet Ying Tan (co-supervised by Ms Karen Bloomberg) and Michelle Smith (co-supervised by Dr Beverley Joffe) were both awarded first class honours. Michelle received the highest mark in the school of Human Communication Sciences.

Objective 6

Foster knowledge transfer to practitioners within the field

We give numerous invited talks to practitioners in the field as well as hosting events for these community-based professionals each year. Dr Hudry conducts training on the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule, and we host the '**Ask the Researcher**' service via our website. In doing so, our aim is to promote evidence-based information in the community. This year we have answered a variety of questions related to research into Autism Spectrum Disorders and a selection of our general responses are available online with a highlighted response also published in our quarterly newsletter (without identifying details).

Talks & Workshops

August 2011

Dr David Trembath, An Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorders. Lecture presented to teachers in training. La Trobe University.

Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake & Associate Professor Amanda Richdale, One day workshop on Autistic Disorder and Asperger's Disorder ;Similarities and differences and changing diagnostic systems'. ACER Workshop Series, Melbourne.

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale, & Dr Catherine (Kate) Simpson, Treating behavioural sleep problems in children: What psychologists need to know. Australian Psychological Society Workshop, Melbourne.

September 2011

Dr Josephine Barbaro, Early detection and diagnosis of ASDs in infants and toddlers. Kalparrin Early Childhood Intervention Program, Greensborough.

October 2011

Dr Josephine Barbaro, Early identification of Autism Spectrum Disorders in infants and toddlers: The Social Attention and Communication Study (SACS). Seoul National University Hospital. Bundang, South Korea.

Dr Josephine Barbaro, Developmental surveillance of Autism Spectrum Disorders in infants and toddlers using the Social Attention and Communication Study-Korean (SACS-K). Sungnam City Child-Adolescent Mental Health Service. Sogang University. Seoul, South Korea.

Dr Giacomo Vivanti, One day workshop on Social Learning in Autism Spectrum Disorders. ACER Workshop Series, Melbourne.

Dr Giacomo Vivanti, Autismo e apprendimento: dalla ricerca alla pratica clinica. Invited Seminar, University Hospital Brotzu, Cagliari, Italy.


Dr Giacomo Vivanti, Un programma innovativo di sorveglianza e presa in carico dell'autismo in Australia. Invited Lecture, Italian National Research Council, Pisa, Italy.

November 2011

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale & Dr Catherine (Kate) Simpson - Treating behavioural sleep problems in children. What Psychologists need to know. Australian Psychological Society Workshop, Melbourne.

Dr Giacomo Vivanti - Social learning in Autism: A neurodevelopmental perspective. Invited Seminar, Swinburne University, Melbourne.

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale & Dr Josephine Barbaro —One day workshop: Assessment and diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders from infancy to adulthood: Who's involved, what to look for, and the assessment process. ACER Workshop Series, Melbourne.



Dr Josephine Barbaro - Detection of infants and toddlers with Autism Spectrum Disorders in the Social Attention and Communication Study (SACS): My Menzies Journey. Annual General Meeting of the Menzies Memorial Scholars Association. Clarendon Terrace, East Melbourne.

December 2011

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale & Dr Sarah Blunden - Treating behavioural sleep problems in children. What Psychologists need to know. Australia Psychological Society Workshop, Perth.

Dr Elfriede Ihnen gave a talk to academics and practitioners at the Scientific Institute Stella Maris, University of Pisa, in Calambrone, (Pisa, Italy) on services for children and adults with an ASD in Australia and the OTARC's work on early identification of ASDs in infants and toddlers (the SACS). Elfriede also talked about our work at the Early Diagnostic Clinic and the Margot Prior Wing.

January 2012

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale conducted a Professional Development session on 'Sleep in Autism Spectrum Disorders' for staff at Irabina Childhood Autism Services.

March 2012

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale gave a talk for Irabina parents entitled 'Sleep development in children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder'

April 2012

Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake participated in a Mental Health Professional Network Webinar on Collaborative care for children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (with Professor Sylvia Rodgers, Dr John Wray, and Professor Andrew Cashin).

Dr Cynthia Zierhut - One day introductory workshop on Early Start Denver Model (ESDM). ACER Workshop Series, Melbourne.

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale & Dr Catherine (Kate) Simpson. Treating behavioural sleep problems in children. What Psychologists need to know. Australian Psychological Society Workshop, Melbourne.

May 2012

Dr David Trembath gave an invited seminar at the Department of Audiology and Speech Pathology, Melbourne University about 'Directions in the development and evaluation of augmentative communication supports for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders'.

Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake presented 'Finding the path to early identification of ASDs' in the School of Psychological Science Research Colloquia Series

June 2012

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale, Ms Ru Cai & Ms Mary Collins conducted a workshop on 'Tertiary Students with Autism' for Chisholm TAFE, Frankston.

ADOS Training with Dr Kristelle Hudry

The OTARC began to offer training to clinicians and researchers on the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) in 2011. The courses are facilitated by Dr Kristelle Hudry, a WPS/ACER accredited ADOS trainer. Kristelle has a PhD in Educational Psychology and expertise in Autism Spectrum Disorders, including early detection and diagnostic assessment.

A maximum of 6 trainees per course permits intensive small-group interaction to facilitate learning.

Irabina Childhood Autism Services, Melbourne - September 26-29th, 2011

Learning and Development for Children, Brisbane - April 23-27th, 2012 (with Dr Sebastian Gaigg co-training)



Other Initiatives



Early Diagnostic Clinic for Autism Spectrum Disorders

Forty eight children have been seen at The Early Diagnostic Clinic (EDC) for ASDs since its opening, in 2011 with 70% of the children assessed meeting criteria for an ASD diagnosis. With one exception, all remaining children have had a developmental and/or language delay. The operation of this service is being evaluated via an online questionnaire for the parent/s of our young clients, with the data thus far being very positive.

The clinic was developed to focus on very young children, and only accepts referrals of children up to 36 months of age. They are assessed by a team of professionals, from the OTARC, with expertise in early diagnostic assessments. They work in close collaboration with specialist Paediatricians from the Royal Children's and Northern Hospitals, as well as community-based Paediatricians, who provide the necessary follow-up health checks and ongoing medical care of the children.

The waiting list that soon developed once we opened the EDC indicated not only the clear need for this service but also the need to extend it. Following a successful Round Table of Trusts and Foundations in February 2012 (hosted by the Office of Alumni and Advancement at LTU, and Chaired by the Vice Chancellor, Prof John Dewar), we have received three philanthropic grants. Another grant from the RE Ross Trust, together with grants from the Phillis Conner Memorial Trust and the William Buckland Foundation allows us to continue operation of the EDC and to extend it to operate two days each week. This will allow more families to have their young children assessed and diagnosed in a timely fashion.

The Margot Prior Wing



The OTARC continues to be centrally involved with the Victorian Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre: The Margot Prior Wing, at the Community Children's Centre within La Trobe University. The exciting news this year was that the federal government has assured funding of this important service for a further three years (to mid-2015). The Centre is about to celebrate its second anniversary, and we look forward to working with its staff who are dedicated to the development of both the children in their care and excellent service at the centre.

Over the last year, the program at the Margot Prior Wing has focused on ensuring continued quality improvement and accountability to the ESDM principles within the group setting. This has included implementation of an inclusion program for children to learn independently with their peers in a mainstream setting. This program also includes a reverse inclusion component in which the typically developing children from the attached mainstream centre visit the playrooms at the Margot Prior Wing.

Staff at the Margot Prior Wing provide training for staff within the mainstream service on ASDs and the ESDM as well as supervising interns. Parent

training is also provided to families at the Centre to support their children at home. Dr Cynthia Zierhut who led the team over the last year has returned to the MIND Institute at UC Davis in Sacramento, where the Early Start Denver Model was developed. Mr Ed Duncan has taken over as the Senior Coordinator of Operations.

WAAD 2012



We celebrated World Autism Awareness Day at the Margot Prior Wing this year as the parents of the children attending the ASELCC wanted to honour Mrs Tennison. Decked in blue, as instructed to mark the day, Mrs Tennison was astonished to discover that she was the focus of our celebrations. The

parents and children endowed her as Honorary Grandmother of the children at the Margot Prior Wing, and presented her with some gifts, including some made for her by the children. Professor Margot Prior was also in attendance. The tables were full of edible treats made by the parent team ably led by Dr Nancy Sadka, whose son James attends the Centre.

ESDM Data Capture Project: A collaborative student project

An exciting project currently underway (initiated by our previous Clinical Manager of the Margot Prior Wing, Dr Cynthia Zierhut, and spearheaded by a volunteer at the OTARC, Mr. Tony Stein from IBM), is the development of a novel device to assist clinicians implementing the ESDM in data collection. Tony proposed the use of a small hand held device (like a game console) to, unobtrusively, capture clinical data while working with the children.

Cynthia and Tony worked together to scope the system needs, with Tony bringing vital IT expertise to this project planning. Together, they provided a comprehensive system requirements document to Dr Torabi from La Trobe's Department of Computer Science and Computer Engineering. He then charged two undergraduate student teams with the task of designing and creating a working prototype.

Each of the teams have demonstrated their prototypes at the end of Semester I, exceeding the expectations of the Steering Committee. We are now confident of a usable data capture technology that will not only be utilized in the Margot Prior Wing, but which can also be used to capture data a variety of therapeutic settings.

Other Appointments


Other research related activities engaged in by the academic and research staff at the Centre include reviewing manuscripts for major national and international scholarly journals, grant applications, and conference submissions.

Associate Professor Dissanayake continues in her work on the editorial board for 'Frontiers in Developmental Psychology' and Child Development Research, and Associate Professor Amanda Richdale is currently coeditor with Associate Professor Kyle Johnson (Departments of Psychiatry and Pediatrics at Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, Oregon) of a new book: *Advances in Autism: Sleep Disorders* (In preparation).

Dr Giacomo Vivanti is a Scientific Consultant for: the Italian Department of Health (Istituto Superiore di Sanita') Committee to establish the Italian Guidelines on ASD Diagnosis and Treatment; the Italian National Research Council (Istituto Superiore di Sanita') Pervasive HealthCare program; Autism Europe International Association for the advancements of rights of persons with autism; the Neuro-Engineering Group, University of Pisa, Italy project on Embodied artifacts as tools to assess and develop pragmatic emotional responsiveness in autism and related conditions; Stella Maris Scientific Institute, University of Pisa Italy project on early diagnosis and predictors of treatment outcomes in the Tuscany region, Italy. He is also a Member of the Editorial Board for *Autismo e Disturbi dello Sviluppo* (Italian journal of Autism), the *Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*, Springer and for the Book Series "Disabilita' e Disturbi dello Sviluppo" (Disability and Developmental Disorders), Franco Angeli publishing company.

Associate Professor Richdale was invited to attend the Annual Board Meeting of the Apex Foundation in Sydney on Nov 18, 2011. Discussion about the Apex Trust for Autism and working with the autism research community led to a planned meeting with Mr Stephen Bigarelli, the Apex Foundation Trust Chair, and the ASfAR interim committee in February 2012 in preparation for the grant round in 2012, which has been successfully accomplished. Associate Professor Amanda Richdale is also a member of the Victorian Behaviour Support Services Practice Advisory Group and a member of the editorial board of *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*.

Associate Professor Dissanayake was recently invited to a Research Workshop on Early Intervention Therapies for Children with Disability, organized by FaHCSIA and held in Canberra (June 14, 2012), where leading researchers from across the country discussed the necessary steps to build a body of research focused on early intervention for children with disability. It was heartening that a number of leading ASD researchers were in attendance. Our task was to advise the Government about what research is necessary to ensure better outcomes for children with disability, their families and carers. The findings will help to inform policy development and result in improvements to early intervention therapies for children with disability. The aim is to build a strong evidence base to underpin the National Disability Insurance Scheme. It is hoped that this long awaited scheme can provide the much needed funds to allow families and individuals access services to address their needs brought about as a result of a disability.



Associate Professor Dissanayake is a member of the Strategic Advisory Committee of the Margot Prior Wing. Together with Professor Prior, Associate Professor Richdale is also a member of the Interim Committee of the ASfAR. Associate Professor Dissanayake is Convenor of the Autism Victoria (Amaze) ASD Research Group of which Associate Professor Richdale is also a member. Associate Professor Richdale also serves on the Board of Educational Programs for Infants and Children (EPIC). Both were invited and attended a Round Table for the Education of Victorian Children with an ASD hosted by the Gandel Foundation at the Chadstone Board Room.

Dr Trembath is a member of the Amaze Accreditation Standards Working Party (2012), and also of the working group revising the Speech Pathology Australia Clinical Guidelines for working in the field of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (2011-2012). He has been a Scientific Committee Member for the 2012 Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, and Physiotherapists of Developmental Disability (SPOT on DD) National Conference and for the 2013 Australian Group on Severe Communication Impairment National Conference. David is also a Project Consultant for a collaborative project involving staff at Liverpool Hospital and the University of New South Wales Centre for Health Equity Training Research and Evaluation aimed at evaluating classroom-based AAC service provision to children with disabilities.

The Autism Education Association

Dr. Elfriede Ihsen has been representing the OTARC in an initiative to establish an Autism Education Association, which is 'the brainchild' of Heather Kirkhope, Subscool Leader, Northern School for Autism. An initial meeting was held on January 24, 2012, was chaired by Professor Margot Prior and attended by professionals from a range of affiliations, including Autism Victoria (AMAZE), DEECD, Catholic Education, the Autism Teaching Institute, and various education facilities, both autism-specific and mainstream.

Heather Kirkhope presented her original vision for an Autism Education Association. There was general agreement of the need for a professional association to support teachers in their efforts to teach an increasing number of students with an ASD, especially teachers in mainstream schools. It was also agreed that there is a lot of expertise and experience amongst educators and the other organisations, which other teachers could benefit from. A Steering Committee was formed which has met regularly and has decided on an initial Mission and Vision Statement:

"The Autism Education Association is to be a professional association promoting evidence-based practice in educating students with ASD with an emphasis on theory to practice. Its purpose is to be a forum to share 'best practice' and enhance communication between educators, consultants and all networks, organisations and services supporting the education of students with ASD across Australia."

We will keep you informed about future developments of this initiative and collaborations with this group.

Preparing for the future

Strategic Planning Day

We had a successful Strategic Planning Day for the OTARC in Dec 2011: Towards 2015: Generosity in Spirit, Excellence in Research, and have been working on implementing some of the agreed outcomes from this day. One of the projects has been updating our website to better reflect who we are and what we are about. We hope to have this site ready in the near future. While we haven't changed our view of ourselves and what we do, we agreed at the planning meeting that these can be better articulated. We also agreed on a Vision for the OTARC and on the Values which underpin our work.

Vision: At the OTARC, we believe everyone on the Autism Spectrum should have equal access to life's opportunities and that scientific research plays a vital role in making this happen. Our staff and students will continue to provide leadership in Autism research, together with our research collaborators in Australia and abroad. We will communicate OTARC's findings with our key stakeholders and supporters in the Autism sector. Doing so will further widen and strengthen our connections and high profile locally, nationally and internationally. Coupled with our ability to engage our supporters effectively, OTARC's long term sustainability and viability will continue to attract quality staff and students, further enhancing La Trobe's research capabilities.

Values: OTARC's collaborations with our diverse network of participant families, researchers, practitioners, service providers and government agencies, will be marked by the following values:

Gracious: A generosity of spirit will imbue our interactions.

Respectful: We will be honest and considerate in our dealings with others, and honour the valuable gift of personal information from participants.

Rigorous: The scientific principles underpinning our research will be of the highest standards, ensuring our convictions are in proportion to the evidence found.

Inspiring: Enliven and motivate others to work with us and to support our research.

Visionary: We will be at the forefront of the science and practice of ASDs.

The following Strategic Priorities were identified:

- Identify, articulate and address the key research themes and projects and align with OTARC's research strengths and directions.
- Create a sustainable future for the centre's continual growth.
- Acquire and retain supporters and stakeholders through well coordinated meaningful and effective engagement.
- Ensure that OTARC operates efficiently and effectively so that research projects are appropriately resourced to provide quality research outputs.

OTARC Operations & Projects

The remit of our Senior Operations and Projects Advisor, Mr Wojciech Nadachowski is to help build operational capacity within the Centre to meet our emerging needs and demands.

His role has involved:

- facilitating the development of a strategic plan;
- implementing a new integrated database (salesforce.com) and electronic marketing platform to assist contact with our participants and others interested in our work;
- developing a communication plan for efficient communication of our research to our stakeholders;
- creating fundraising campaign ideas to develop new streams of income;
- instigating a volunteer management process to support some of our administrative functions.

These tasks have been made easier by the thoughtful input and work done by the team, especially Lisbeth Wilks, Elfriede Ihsen and Carmela Germano. Woj has also received indispensable support within the wider university. Many people have embraced our Centre's vision and have worked hard to assist us:

- Paula Williamson and Trish Tosti, the School of Psychological Science;
- Lisa Prowling, Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering;
- Judith Evans and her team in Digital Marketing: Matthew, Alice, Daniel and Steven;
- Professor Robin Williams' team at Alumni and Advancement: Ric, Rebecca, Jo and Carmen;
- Jill Roberston and Stewart Sherwood at ICT.

Much of our work relies on the generosity of people (and organisations) who have donated their time, products and services to OTARC.

Companies

- The Salesforce.com Foundation has donated a set of ten enterprise licenses valued at \$21,600 per annum;
- WeAreDigital are helping OTARC develop a digital communications plan with strategy development and digital infrastructure implementation.

People

- Mike Burnside (salesforce.com development)
- Jeff Challis (salesforce.com development)
- David Ferriggi (salesforce.com development)
- Peter Johanson (data cleansing)
- Eric Prugh (communication plan development)
- Jessica Stimson (WeAreDigital – communication plan development)
- Karson Stimson (WeAreDigital – communication plan development)
- Robert Smart (Volunteer Management)

The OTARC Lab Operations Project

Our capacity at the OTARC to achieve our objectives is reliant on a well functioning and well equipped laboratory and a consistent stream of participants to engage in our research studies. The refurbishment of the OTARC Laboratory, which included the installation of new state-of-the-art digital audio-visual equipment, commenced in late November 2011 and was completed in late February 2012.

Under the leadership of our Lab Manager, Carmela Germano, and with assistance from Wojciech Nadachowski, we have begun to reinvigorate existing processes and procedures within the lab and develop new ones to support our research. This includes the development of Policy and Procedure Manuals to ensure consistent and sustainable processes for laboratory operations.

We have begun 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;
 - Improve the integration of communication with participants to ensure that they enjoy their engagement in our studies;
 - Improve the co-ordination of recruitment and retention of participants in research activities at the Centre.

A Steering Committee was formed to oversee the project comprising Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, Mr Cliff Picton (La Trobe University Ombudsman), Ms Paula Williamson (School of Psychological Science Executive Officer), Dr David Trembath (Post Doctoral 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 2012

		Ending 30 June 2012 Actual \$	Ending 30 June 2011 Actual \$
Revenues			
Commonwealth Grants - DEEWR		21,703	42,201
State Government Grants		0	243,847
Research Revenue		83,498	127,280
Investment Revenue	Interest on monies held	102,754	78,236
Commercial Revenue		46,904	29,587
Other Grants and Donations		580,498	520,636
Other Revenue		21,960	12,379
Internal Revenue/Transfers		100,000	114,011
Total Revenue		957,317	1,168,184
Expenses			
Total Employee Benefits and on costs		825,637	446,440
Academic		626,685	379,149
Casual - Academic		281	57,051
General		114,167	34,125
Casual - General		83,921	32,846
Other salary related		584	-56,730
Total Non Salary Expenditure		227,877	102,822
Infrastructure Related	Maintenance, services	20,217	21,799
Depreciation		10,581	6,790
Professional Fees	Consultancies, etc	13,113	656
Student Related	Scholarships, Stipends, Training	48,258	41,665
General Operating	General Admin Costs	14,724	14,056
Staff related	Travel, Accom., Entertainment	29,686	19,874
Financing costs		-8	0
Other Expenses/Sundry Items		4,454	1,380
Internal Expense Transfers		86,854	-3,399
Total Expenses		1,053,514	549,262
Net Operating Result		-118,213	618,922
Internal Transfers			-50,000
Underlying Operating Result		-118,213	668,922
Opening Balance of Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre		2,593,782.18	1,924,860.46
Movement for the Financial Year ending 30/06/2012		-118,213.21	668,921.72
		2,497,584.73	2,593,782.18
Increase due to Capital		33,124.58	
Closing Balance as at 30/06/2012		2,530,709.31	2,593,782.18



Staffing and Centre Personnel

Staff

Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, Director (and Reader in the School of Psychological Science)
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 in Developmental Psychology in the School of Psychological Science
Mr Wojciech Nadachowski, Senior Advisor, Operations & Projects
Ms Lisbeth Wilks, Administrative Officer
Ms Carmela Germano, Laboratory Manager
Ms Irene Giaprakis, EDC Intake Officer
Mr Lachlan Burnside, IT Administration

Academic Adjuncts

Dr Naomi Bishop, Adjunct member (Department of Microbiology)
Dr Diane Jacobs, Adjunct member (School of Human Communication Sciences)
Dr Danuta Loesch, Adjunct member (School of Psychological Science)
Dr Nuscat Y Ahmed, Adjunct member, Hope Centre, Bangladesh

Research Assistants

Ms. Lindsay Pamment
Ms Ru Cai
Ms Gladys Cheung
Ms Kate Argentino
Ms Teena Caithness

Honorary Members

Ms Amanda Golding, Amagol Consulting/Autism Noticeboard
Mr Tony Stein, IBM
Eric Prugh, Exact Target
Mike Burnside, Salesforce
Robert Smart

Volunteers

Parise Nichole Gentikoglou	Peter Johansen
Kenzo Low	Lachlan West
Lisa Furlong	Rebekah Tipping
Stefanie Dimov	Jeff Challis (AA Konsult)
Steven Berends	Girish Krishnamurthy
Luke Bell	Kate Robinson



Governance - Advisory Committee



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

Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, Centre Director, La Trobe University

Professor Tim Brown, DVC Research, La Trobe University

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, University Ombudsman, La Trobe University

Professor Robin Williams, Director of Alumni and Advancement, Office of the Vice-Chancellor, La Trobe University

Professor Christine Bigby, School of Social Work, La Trobe University (Retired from the committee in 2012)

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

Ms Lia Castorini, Autism Victoria (AMAZE)

Professor Jacqueline Roberts, Griffith University, NSW (Retired from the committee in 2012)

Mr Oreste Pompetti, Finance & Administration Manager EPIC Centre, Bundoora (Retired from the committee in 2012)

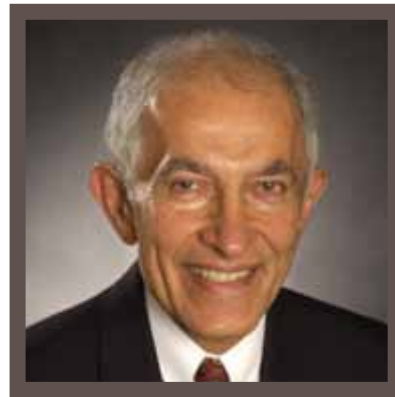
Ms Cherie Green, PhD candidate, Student representative for OTARC, La Trobe University



The Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) was initially 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.

The 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.



Professor David de Kretser, former Governor of Victoria (April 2006 – 2011), is the Patron of the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre.

