

Another piece



Issue 5, September 2009

Olga Tennison
AUTISM RESEARCH CENTRE
 A U S T R A L I A

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Announcing

The Olga Tennison Autism PhD Scholarship

to be undertaken at any University or affiliated research centre in Australia

To encourage research and collaboration on Autism Spectrum Disorders, the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre is offering a competitive PhD research scholarship to be awarded to the best candidate-supervisor team with an innovative research proposal.

The scholarship, which includes a yearly stipend of \$21,000 (approx.) for 3-years, will commence in 2010, and is only available to Australian citizens.

For full application packs, including information on candidature, eligibility, etc., please contact:

Ms Lisbeth Wilks
 Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre
 School of Psychological Sciences
 T 61 3 9479 2497
 E otarc@latrobe.edu.au
 Applications close: 30 October 2009

The successful applicant will need a First Class Honours degree (or equivalent) or a Masters degree (research or coursework) including **“a dissertation demonstrating the ability to undertake research at doctoral level”**. Award of the scholarship will be contingent on the applicant meeting criteria for acceptance at the institution in which they plan to enrol. The application must be supported by the supervisor of the research project. A selection panel will be formed from the Australasian Autism Research Collaboration.

Developments at The Margot Prior Wing

The Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre (ASELCC) planning is well underway.

The Strategic Advisory Group for the new centre (of which the OTARC Director is also a member) has had its inaugural meeting. Dr Kerry Fergusson (Pro Vice Chancellor - Equity, Access and Student Services) is the Chair, with **representatives from the Royal Children's Hospital, Northern Autistic School, Olympic Village Primary School and the La Trobe University Community Children's Centre.**

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale is representing OTARC on the ASELCC Clinical Evaluation Group which is funded by FAHCSIA to undertake a clinical evaluation of the six federally funded centres (one per state). Associate Professor Jacqui Roberts heads up this group, and has led two meetings to date. Work is underway to evaluate the programs which will be offered across these centres.



The first meeting of the Strategic Advisory Group planning the new Autism Specific Wing of the La Trobe Community Children's Centre.

Seated: Dr Kerry Fergusson, Pro Vice Chancellor - Equity, Access and Student Services, Ms Jenny Reynolds, Director of the La Trobe Community Children's Centre; Ms Denise Clarke, Acting Principal of the Northern School for Autism.

Standing: Mr Stephen Muir, Parent representative; Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, Director of the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre; and Dr Catherine Maraffa, Deputy Director of Developmental Medicine at the Royal Children's Hospital (Melbourne).

Absent: Associate Professor Jill Sewell, Deputy Director at the Centre for Community Child Health at the Royal Children's Hospital (Melbourne) and Ms Libby Young, Principal of the Olympic Village Primary School.



Director's Report

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Chair— Prof Margot
Prior, LTU, Melbourne
University, and RCH*

*Associate Professor
Cheryl Dissanayake,
Centre Director, LTU*

*Professor Tim Brown,
DVC Research, La Trobe
University*

*Prof David Finlay, Dean
of Faculty of Science,
Technology and
Engineering, LTU*

*Dr Catherine Maraffa,
Senior Paediatrician,
RCH*

*Dr Jacqueline Roberts,
Clinical Lecturer,
University of Sydney,
NSW*

*Mr Clifford Picton, LTU
Ombudsman*

*Professor Christine
Bigby, School of Social
Work, LTU*

*Ms Liza Boston, CEO
Cracked Pepper Media*

*Associate Professor
Amanda Richdale, ASD
Research Reference
Group*

*Ms Cherie Green, PhD
candidate, LTU Student
representative*

By all accounts The 2009 Asia Pacific Autism Conference (APAC) was highly successful with over 1600 educators, researchers, service providers, practitioners, people with an autism spectrum disorder as well as families and presentations attending together with exhibitors and sponsors from around Australia, New Zealand, Asia Pacific and around the globe.

OTARC was well represented with myself and Associate Professor Richdale attending together with six of our doctoral students. We also had a display table, which attracted much interest throughout the meeting.

The next APAC will be held in 2011 in Perth.

A second meeting of the Australasian Autism Research Collaboration (AARC) was held in Sydney recently, as a follow-up from the forum OTARC hosted in April.

Our goal in fostering a National Research Network is being realised as a result of the work and planning being undertaken by members of this collaboration. A further meeting is planned in Adelaide in November.

You can visit the website of this collaboration at <http://sites.google.com/site/autismresearchaustralia/aarc>



*Associate
Professor
Cheryl
Dissanayake,
PhD MAPS*

I recently attended a forum at JB Were/Goldman Sachs, with our Chair, Professor Margot Prior, on Philanthropic funding for Medical Research in Australia with Sir Gus Nossal as an invited speaker. This was a most informative meeting.

A small application to the School of Psychological Science to upgrade our behaviour coding software and associated hardware was successful and we will be proceeding with the update shortly.

The 3-year Post Doctoral (Level B) and 5-year Senior Research (Level C) Fellowships were advertised with applications closing on Friday 28 August. The applications have now been shortlisted and interviews will begin shortly.

A new postgraduate (Alex Zammit) undertaking a doctorate of clinical neuropsychology has joined the lab, taking the total number of doctoral students to eight. He will be supervised primarily by Assoc Prof Amanda Richdale, with co-supervision provided by Assoc Prof Cheryl Dissanayake and Assoc Prof Rajiv Khosla (Director, Research Centre for Computers, Communication and social Innovation). A new student volunteer (Chloe Hannah) from RMIT has also begun to work with us one day per week.

Informing community based professionals about autism is an important part of our role in helping promote awareness of Autism Spectrum Disorders, particularly the benefits of early detection and diagnosis.



A mate called Matilda

Associate Professor Rajiv Khosla with his new 'emotionally intelligent' friend, Matilda, who has recently arrived from NEC in Japan. We are collaborating with Dr Khosla to utilise his 'emotionally intelligent' software in studies of Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Donations

To fund our research activities we rely on the support of private and corporate donors. Our thanks are extended to the individuals and organisations who have made donations to the [Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre](#).

Donations can be made online or through mail and telephone. To access these options go to www.latrobe.edu.au/foundation. Remember to specify that your donation is for the [Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre \(OTARC\)](#). Please note that all donations to La Trobe University are tax deductible. If you need more information, please call (03) 9479 2497 or email otarc@latrobe.edu.au. Recent donations, received with thanks, include:

Early Childhood Intervention
Australia (Tasmanian Chapter)
Whittlesea Kindergarten
Teachers Association Inc
RMIT University

The 8th Annual Autism Research Forum

hosted by Autism Victoria

Tuesday 10th November 2009, 9am—5pm

Grevillea Room—Darebin Arts & Entertainment Centre, Bell Street, Preston

This forum provides an excellent opportunity to heard about Autism Spectrum Disorders research currently being undertaken by Victorian research teams, including that undertaken by undergraduate and postgraduate students. The Autism Victoria Research Reference Groups (a sub committee of Autism Victoria Professional Panel) is especially pleased to welcome our keynote speaker, Dr Natasha Brown. Dr Brown is a paediatrician whose primary interest is in developmental disability. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne in clinical genetics. She will present a paper on the Genetics of Autism. Where she will provide an overview on this complex topic.

The Forum will provide an opportunity to share common interests and concerns in the autism research field. It will be suitable for all autism researchers, including students, clinicians, and autism educators, as well as parents.

Please note that the forum will focus on research matters and participants should have a reasonable knowledge of ASD and research methodology.

Program details and registration forms will be available on the Autism Victoria website www.autismvictoria.org.au from 19 October.



Tell them all about it!

Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake will be the keynote speaker at the Booroondara Early Years Conference on the evening of the 14 October 2009.

Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake has given a number of invited talks in Melbourne and interstate.

June

Early Childhood Intervention Association, Tasmanian Chapter, Hobart.

Early Childhood Intervention Association, Tasmanian Chapter, Launceston.

July

Royal Children's Hospital Seminar, Melbourne.



Media File

Professor Margot Prior and Associate Professor Cheryl Dissanayake have had some TV media coverage recently on the [ABC News](#) (23 & 24 July) and [ABC Stateline](#), Canberra (14 Aug). The print and radio media followed up on these stories which had to do with our findings that the prevalence of ASDs in Australia is greater than that specified to date in other national and some international studies.

We also had a feature article in the Winter edition of [the La Trobe University Bulletin](#).

We have continued our regular column in the [Help4Parents e-newsletter](#).

APAC 09 Conference presentations: Sydney, August

Keynote:

Dissanayake, C., Promoting early identification of infants and toddlers with ASD.

Oral presentations:

Dissanayake, C., Delayed self-recognition in children with **Autistic Disorder and Asperger's Disorder**. Evidence for a temporally extended self.

Barbaro, J., Dissanayake, C. Prospectively identifying infants **'at risk' of an ASD in a** community based sample: Results from the Social Attention and Communication Study (SACS).

Poster presentations:

Richdale, A., Robinson, A., Parent and Child factors associated with Sleep Problems in Pervasive Developmental Disorders, Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability.

Chandler, F., Dissanayake, C., An Exploration of the Internal Working Models of caregiver Attachments in High-Functioning Children with Autistic Disorder.

Mifsud, J., Kelly, R., Dissanayake, C., Leekam, S., Pretense in High-Functioning Children with Autism: How **'Playful' is their Paly?**

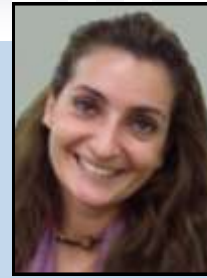
Newbiggin, A., Dissanayake, C., Empathy and Responsiveness in High-Functioning Autism.



David Trembath



Assoc Prof
Teresa Iacono



Dr Haris Karnezi



Dr Joanna
Kwasiborska



Visitors to our Centre

Recent visitors to our centre have included three academic speech pathologists: Mr David Trembath, lecturer in Applied Science with a special interest in Autism Spectrum Disorders from the University of Sydney; Associate Professor Teresa Iacono, Deputy Director at the Centre for Developmental Disability Health Victoria from Monash University; Dr Haris Karnezi, Autism Drama Therapist, from Trinity College, Ireland; and Dr Joanna Kwasiborska, a speech therapist and assistant

lecturer in the Department of Speech Therapy, Maria Grzegorzewska Academy of Special Education in Warsaw, Poland.

Other visitors have included Dr Angelica Rose from the Drama for Everyday Life Program which aims to develop social skills and raise self esteem in children, and Mr Dennis Crowley who is a member of the Autism Victoria Board and a grandparent, and is interested in biomedical treatments.



Become a Friend of OTARC on FACEBOOK

If you are one of the 400 million people registered to Facebook, you can become a 'FAN' of the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre and get regular, up-to-the-minute postings of the latest news from our centre.

Publications

Chu, J, & Richdale, A. (2009) Sleep quality and psychological wellbeing in mothers of children with developmental disabilities. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*. Vol 30, 1512-1522.

Sweet dreams, Amanda

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale and her colleague Associate Professor Kimberly Schrek (Penn State Harrisburgh in the USA) will have a poster in the Fifth Annual Pediatric Sleep Medicine Conference, Oct 2-4 2009 in Denver Colorado USA.

The title of the poster is '*Parent Knowledge of Childhood Sleep Patterns*'.

Associate Professor Richdale will also present the poster at the Australasian Sleep Association and Australasian Sleep Technologists **Association's 21st Annual Scientific Meeting** at the Sofitel Hotel, Melbourne, on the 8-10 October 2009.

These meetings are unique opportunities to network, share knowledge and ideas, establish collaborative projects, and set priorities for the future of the field, and continue to build on current momentum.

For more information about the Australasian Sleep Association and Australasian Sleep Technologists **Association's Meeting** go to www.sleep.org.au.

For more details about the Fifth Annual Pediatric Sleep Medicine Conference go to www.pedsleepmedconference.com



Adam

The committee and staff of OTARC received complimentary passes from 20th Century Fox for a preview screening of the **movie 'ADAM'**.

This film is a story about a handsome and intriguing **young man with Asperger's Syndrome**, Adam (Hugh Dancy), who has always led a sheltered existence, until he meets his new neighbour, Beth (Rose Byrne), a beautiful, cosmopolitan young woman who pulls him into the outside world, with funny, touching and entirely unexpected results. Their enigmatic relationship reveals how far two people from different realities can stretch in search of an extraordinary connection.

This gentle film touched all who attended the special screening, including our foundation donor, Mrs Olga Tennison.

For Your Information

This is a page of events, requests and opportunities from organisations other than The Olga Tennison Research Centre.

We publish these items as a service to our readers.

To find out more about any item on this page please go directly to the organisation that posted the notice.

Autism Behavioural Intervention Association presents a practical, hands-on workshop by Dr Jeanette McAfee, author of the internationally acclaimed book, "Navigating the Social World".

A Social/Emotional Skills program for parents and professionals who work with individuals with High-Functioning Autism, Asperger Syndrome and Related Disorders. For registration details contact ABIA on 9830 0677 or download registration form www.abia.net.au

Well-being of Parents and Siblings of Children with a Disability

The aim of this project is to identify the extent to which different factors contribute to sibling psychological adjustment. The study will focus on an assessment of parent and sibling reports about parental well-being, sibling emotional functioning and supports. It is anticipated that the information obtained from this study will help to identify the best way to support parents and siblings of children with developmental delay or disability and enhance their psychological well-being. Parents and siblings will be invited to complete questionnaires and return them by prepaid post. Participants will include siblings aged 6-18 of children with developmental delay or disability and their parents.

Shivaun Pereira, Dariane McLean, Kate Bannister and Associate Professor Susana Gavidia-Payne (RMIT University)

Contact: susana.gavidia-payne@rmit.edu.au
03 9925-7710
dariane@mcleancorp.com

The lived experiences of fathers of children with autism

I am conducting a research project with Associate Professor Lawrence Moloney, Head of the Department of Counselling and Psychological Health in the School of Public Health, towards completion of a Master of Counselling Psychology degree at La Trobe University. The purpose of this study is to explore how fathers manage and arrange their lives around having children, at least one of whom has a diagnosis of autism, how they see their roles in comparison to the roles of their partners and how they view fatherhood generally. It is hoped that this research will give fathers of children with autism an opportunity to talk about the role they play as parents. Moreover, the project aims to look for common experiences (routine, joyful, challenging etc) of being a father to an autistic child. I am looking for fathers who are willing to be interviewed about their experiences of raising a child with autism aged 6-12 years and who are living with their partners.

Recruitment for this research ends in early November 2009.

If you would like to participate, or obtain further information, please contact myself, Siyan Fong (e-mail:

s2fong@students.latrobe.edu.au) or my supervisor, Lawrence Moloney (e-mail: l.moloney@latrobe.edu.au).



We are researching many ASD puzzles at La Trobe.



Research News



What's happening Carmela?

The team at OTARC recently held a little 'farewell and good luck' morning tea for our Lab Manager Carmela Germano (front row, second from the left). **Not that she's going anywhere. We've coaxed her to stay on two days a week while she expands her experience and lengthens her CV on the other days.**

Participants are needed for our research projects. If you, or a family member, wishes to participate in research please email the Centre at otarc@latrobe.edu.au or phone 9479 2497. Many research projects need typically developing children as well as children with an Autism Spectrum Disorders.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR A RESEARCH PROJECT ON PRETEND PLAY IN CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

A study is underway at the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC) at La Trobe University, examining the pretend play abilities of children with autism.

We currently seek both:

- Children who have been diagnosed with Autistic Disorder, who are aged between 4 and 7 years, with good verbal ability.

- Typically developing children, aged between 4 and 7 years, whose development poses no concerns to parents and teachers

The testing will take place over a single session at the OTARC at La Trobe University. The results of the developmental assessment undertaken as part of the study will be available to parents. If you would like your child to participate or if you wish to obtain further information about this research, please contact:

Jessica Mifsud

Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre

School of Psychological Science

La Trobe University

Ph: (03) 9479 3271

Email: j.mifsud@latrobe.edu.au



Phone: 61 3 9479 2497

Fax: 61 3 9479 1956

Email: otarc@latrobe.edu.au

Web: www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc

WHERE TO FIND US

The Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre is situated in a purpose-built child-friendly research facility in the School of Psychological Science (George Singer Building).
Bundoora Campus
La Trobe University