

Another piece



Issue 3, March 2009

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

Inside this issue:

Pictures from Prof Rogers' forum	2
What do we know? Where should we go?	3
Media File	3
Congratulations, Olga!	3
Director's Report	4
Donations	4
Staff Profile: Dr Amanda Richdale	5
Tell them all about it	6
Grants & Tenders	6
The Raising Children Network launches a new website for parents of young children with Autism	7
Visitors to our Centre	8
Student News	8



Professor Sally Rogers conjured up some magic at the Early Start Denver Model forum held at the Melbourne Convention & Exhibition Centre.

A successful, and inspiring week

Prof. Sally Rogers and two of her colleagues from the MIND Institute at UC Davis in Sacramento were in Melbourne for the last week in February. The one-day introductory forum on the Early Start Denver Model - an intervention designed for infants, toddlers and preschoolers with autism - was attended by approximately 170 participants including EI-professionals, students, academics and parents... it was a very successful, and inspiring day.

An intensive two-day workshop was held at OTARC to train three EI teams (one each from Vic. WA and NSW) to fidelity on the ESDM so that they may begin implementing the program in Australia. These teams will also be able to train others on this program to promote very early intervention for newly diagnosed toddlers and preschoolers.

We plan to undertake research on of the efficacy of the delivery of the ESDM in Australia, and we will collaborate with the MIND team in doing this important and exciting work.

Professor
Sally
Rogers'
Early
Start
Denver
Model



1. Professor Sally Rogers, Dr Laurie Vismara and Dr Cynthia Zeighut field questions from the forum audience.
2. Dr Laurie Vismara speaking to the intensive training team from W A
3. Dr Dissanayake and Professor Rogers share common goals
4. **Professor Rogers'** intensive training team from Victoria at work.
5. An attentive audience at the forum.
6. Dr Laurie Vismara gets her message across during training.
7. Resources on display
8. Networking between sessions

Autism Research in Australasia: What do we know? Where should we go?

The [Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre](#) is hosting this event to bring together leading Australasian autism researchers to identify current research strengths, to develop and plan future research directions, and to strengthen and forge new Australasian autism research collaborations. The workshop is being held at the Research Park at La Trobe University on April 6-7, 2009.

The workshop will include invited presentations on central themes in autism, including early identification, intervention and education, epidemiology, and recent advances in the neuroscience of autism. In addition, there will be small group discussions on selected topics led by nominated topic leaders. Day-2 will begin with a plenary session discussing the gaps in autism research identified in the sessions on day-1. The plan on the second day is to work toward developing a national research agenda, with the aim of facilitating collaboration and data sharing to achieve our joint goals.

This event is by invitation only. A report of the workshop will be made available to all delegates and interested parties and posted on our website, after the event.

Identifying
current research
strengths and
developing and
planning future
research
directions.



Congratulations Olga!

Mrs Olga Tennison was a recent recipient of an Honorary Life membership of Autism Victoria.

A presentation was made during **Autism Victoria's 2008 Annual General Meeting** in November last year.



Media File

We have had some print media coverage recently to promote the Early Start Denver Model. Professor Rogers and Dr Dissanayake had an interview with Richard Edey on ABC *Life Matters*, which was broadcast on Monday 2 March.

[10 Feb 09, Herald Sun](#)

Early diagnosis set to help children with autism

[16 Feb 09 Preston Leader](#)

Fast Alert Program on Autism

[Help4Parents e-zine Feb 09](#)

Terminology when referring to children with ASD



ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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

*Associate Professor
Cheryl Dissanayake,
Centre Director, LTU*

*Mr Murray Dawson-
Smith, CEO Autism
Victoria*

*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*

I am pleased to welcome Associate Professor Amanda Richdale who is now working at our Centre three days a week. We are delighted to have her at the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre given her vast experience and expertise in autism. It has been a busy start to the year with Dr Richdale and I working with the Parenting Research Centre to develop content for the National Workshops for Autism (Early Days), and the new parenting website.

In other news, one of our close collaborators, Professor Sue Leekam at the University of Durham, has just accepted a Chair in Autism at the University of Cardiff in Wales (which is one of two Autism Chairs in the UK). I will be meeting with Sue in Chicago in May prior to the IMFAR meeting to further our joint collaboration on the pretence abilities of children with an ASD.

I will also meet with Prof. Sally Rogers and her team while in Chicago to discuss further possibilities in promoting the Early Start Denver Model in Australia, and the collaborative research endeavours that will accompany this.

Planning for the Autism Research in Australasia meeting is now in the final stages. This is an important event in our calendar and I look forward to reporting on the outcome of this 2-day meeting in our next newsletter. A formal report on this meeting will also be available on our website.

Lisbeth Wilks is now managing our website. I encourage you to monitor our site and send us your responses and suggestions.

Looking ahead, we will have our first **AGM in June...which will mark a year of operation of the OTARC.**

Cheryl Dissanayake, PhD MAPS

Donations

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

[The Bendigo Branch of Australian Psychological Society](#)

[June Hay](#)

[Wantirna Heights School](#)

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



Staff Profile: Associate Professor Amanda Richdale: Research fellow at the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre

Dr Richdale has worked in autism for over 20 years. She is Chair of the Professional Panel of Autism Victoria and has published 27 peer reviewed articles and 3 book chapters on autism.

Dr Richdale is one of the partners in the successful Parenting Research Centre application for the *Autism National Workshops* Federal Government tender and she has been busy attending meetings and working on material for the workshops and the new *Raising Children Network Autism website*.

Her research interests include autism spectrum disorders, and intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Dr Richdale's particular research interest is in sleep problems in children with autism spectrum disorders and other developmental disabilities and she is currently working with Dr. Kimberly Schreck, Penn State, USA and Dr Beth Malow, Vanderbilt, USA. She will be co-editing a new book series on sleep in autism to be called *Advances in Sleep Disorders* with Dr Beth Malow. She is also co-convening the first Special Interest Group on Sleep in Autism at International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) in Chicago, USA in May 2009 with Dr Beth Malow. She has been invited to provide a research presentation on the importance of treatment of sleep problems in ASD at the 2010 Autism Treatment Network (ATN) Research Meeting in November, 2010 in Santa Monica, CA.



Dr Richdale has current PhD students completing the following projects:

- *Approaches and methods of practice in early in intervention in autism and related disorders.*
- *Language, literacy, and behaviour of children with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder, specific language impairment, or specific reading disorder, and typically developing peers (submitted Feb 2009)*
- *The impact of diet on children's behaviour and learning*
- *Executive function and social skills in young high-functioning children with autism*
- *Friendships in adolescents with high-functioning ASD - a project on social information processing—with Dr Cheryl Dissanayake*



Tell them all about it!

Dr Dissanayake has given a number of invited talks since our last newsletter, and has a number already scheduled for this year.

March 4—Guest Speaker at the Eastern Region Maternal & Child Health Service

March 11—Keynote Speaker at the Wantirna Heights Parent Conference

March 17— Invited presentation at the Grampians Mental Health Conference

We also have a number of papers and posters accepted at conferences – six members of OTARC will give presentations at The International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) is being held in Chicago from 7-9 May, 2009. These will be listed in our next Newsletter (due in June). Dr Richdale has also been invited as a keynote speaker at the Autism Treatment Network meeting in Santa Monica in 2010, and she is co-convening the first Sleep in Autism Special Interest Group Meeting at IMFAR this year.

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.



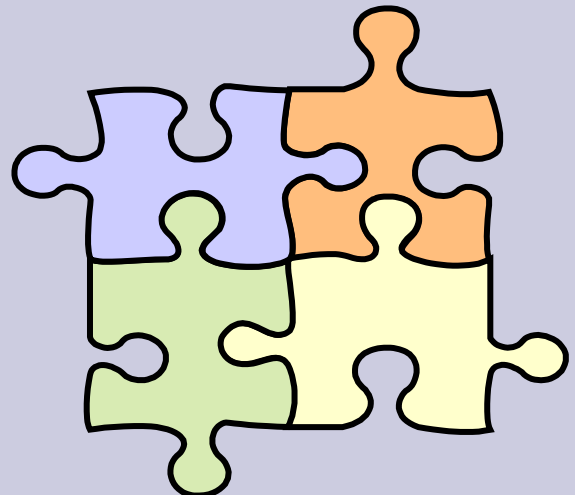
Grants & tenders

FACHSIA Tenders

The work we are undertaking with the Parenting Research Centre on the FaCHSIA tender for the National Workshops is well underway. The first Early Days workshop was run on February 24th. Dr Richdale and Dr Dissanayake have also been centrally involved in developing content for the **new Raising Children’s Network – Autism** website (see Page 5), which was also launched on 24 February. Ms Cherie Green (PhD candidate and the student representative on the OTARC Advisory Committee) has also been central in developing this content. We encourage you to view this site at www.raisingchildren.net.au/autism.

WATCH THIS SPACE!

There will be two very exciting announcements in our next newsletter.



RAISING CHILDREN NETWORK LAUNCHES A SPECIAL WEBSITE FOR PARENTS OF YOUNG CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

The Federal Government and the Raising Children Network launched a new national website for parents of young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) on 24 February 2009 - www.raisingchildren.net.au/autism

The [Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre](#) is pleased to have contributed to the content of this new website.

Intended to assist and support Australian families and professionals with parenting information, resources, and improve connections between families, professionals, and services, the site will deliver quality-assured Australian specific information.

One in every 160 Australian children has an Autism Spectrum Disorder. The parents raising these children often report a lack of online information specific to the Australian local experience.

“We know from research that parents of a child with a disability actively use the internet to search for more information on their child’s condition but that until now there was a dearth of evidence-based information and very limited details of the resources and support available within Australia,” said the Raising Children Network’s spokesperson, Warren Cann of the Parenting Research Centre.

The three main features of this website are;

1. Learning about Autism Spectrum Disorder – information to better understand the condition
2. Parent Guide to Therapies – detailed descriptions of common therapies and interventions including reference to the evidence, safety and financial considerations
3. Interactive Autism Service Pathfinder to help parents navigate the ASD service and support system in each State and Territory

Online discussion forums are also available for parents and professionals to share experiences and tips about raising children with ASD.

To further support parents and carers in finding and using local services and resources, this event also marked the launch of MY NEIGHBOURHOOD. My Neighbourhood has been three years in development and features detailed aerial maps and up to date local service information for the whole country. Now parents all over **Australia can get a bird’s eye** view of their family-friendly neighbourhood and participate by sharing information with fellow parents about playgrounds and other helpful destinations.

(There is a dedicated Autism set under Specialty Health.)

The ASD content being launched on the Raising Children Network website is the first wave of more ASD specific information and resources that will be added to the website over the next six months.

With over 11 million visitors since its launch in May 2006, the Raising Children website has established itself as the most reliable and helpful Australian online resource supporting parents of young children. It is freely accessible with quality assured information based on the best available research and delivered in a range of user-friendly formats using state of the art communication and web technologies.

“The Raising Children website’s aim is to resource and support parents and to celebrate the diversity and abilities of all children. Most of the information on the website is relevant to all parents but the purpose of the section dealing with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder is to provide their parents with relevant information on issues specific to their situation,” said Mr Cann.

Visitors to our Centre

OTARC was visited by **Dr Torbjorn Famker**, Professor in Occupational Therapy, School of Health Sciences at Jönköping University, Sweden, who is taking up a 4-year Research Professorship at Curtin University beginning Jan. 2010. Torbjorn is a researcher in vision science/OT and is seeking collaboration on an autism project while he is here.



Associate Professor Rajiv Khosla (Director of the Business Systems and Knowledge Modelling Lab at La Trobe University) and Dr Dissanayake met regarding an exciting collaboration with him and NEC in Japan using some sophisticated (emotionally intelligent!) software they have developed that may be used to facilitate learning in children with autism. Following a preliminary study, we plan on submitting an ARC Linkage Grant to support research in this area.



Student News

Welcome to **Ms Cathy Bent** who is undertaking her Honours this year and congratulations to **Mr John Tee** who has begun a Clinical Doctorate and has received a scholarship. Another part-time honours student, **Ms Lindsay Pamment** has also joined OTARC as a volunteer.

Recently accepted papers & posters:

Clifford, S.M., & Dissanayake, C. (2009, in press). Dyadic and triadic behaviours in infancy as precursors to social understanding and social responsiveness in young children with Autistic Disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*

Barbaro, J & Dissanayake, C. (2009, poster). **Prospectively identifying infants 'at risk' of an ASD in an Australian community-based sample: results from the social attention and communication study (SACS)** *International Conference on Innovative Research In Autism - April 15-17, 2009 Tours, Loire Valley, France*

Richdale, A. L., & Schreck, K. A. (Accepted Feb, 2009). Sleep problems in Autism Spectrum Disorders: Prevalence, nature, and possible biopsychosocial aetiologies, *Sleep Medicine Reviews*

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 Autism Spectrum Disorders.



Phone: 61 3 9479 2497
Fax: 61 3 9479 1956
E-mail: otarc@latrobe.edu.au

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