



The Olga Tennison
Autism Research Centre

Annual Report 2015

Image:
George Aristovoulou
Not titled, 2013
prisma colour pencil on paper
38 x 38.5cm
Courtesy the artist and Arts Project Australia,
Melbourne

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Introduction

Welcome to the eighth Annual Report of the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre!

A key activity during 2015 has been the development of a mobile app for use by parents to detect early signs of autism. This exciting development represents a joint initiative with one of the largest IT companies in the world, Salesforce, who built the app for us based on research undertaken at OTARC. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the team at Salesforce headed by Dan Bogнар, Senior Vice President for Solutions Engineering in the Asia Pacific. Dan and I attended the Salesforce Advantage tour late in 2015 to promote the app called ASDetect that I know will change lives here and internationally.

We continue to extend our reach internationally, with a new PhD scholar funded by AusAid joining us from Autism Care Nepal. Ms Rena Shrestha will be researching implementation of Social Attention and Communication Surveillance in Kathmandu, extending the very successful work undertaken both in Victoria and elsewhere. Building capacity in scholars from low resource nations is a very effective means of global knowledge transfer, sorely needed in the area of autism.

We have garnered increased interest and commitment in our work on adolescence and adulthood, particularly around understanding the outcomes of employment for adults with autism. We are keen to profile the strengths and difficulties that serve as enablers and barriers to employment. A PhD candidate from France, Ms Eva Laurent, with expertise in neuropsychology, has joined us in this endeavor.

Our work in the Autism CRC in both the early years and adolescence and adulthood also continues strongly, and is now extending into the area of early intervention with a number of related projects underway. Thus it has been another highly successful year, but none of it would be possible without the extraordinary team of staff, students and volunteers who each contributed to our achievements this year.

I would also like to acknowledge the help and guidance of our Advisory Committee, ably led by Professor Margot Prior. And last, but certainly not least, heartfelt thanks from all of us at OTARC and La Trobe to Mrs Olga Tennison for her generous and continued support.



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



2015 Highlights



Dr Darren Hedley, Wojciech Nadachowski, Michael Fieldhouse (HP) and Thorkil Sonne (Specialisterne)

1. The Dandelion Project

The Dandelion Project is a new partnership between OTARC, Hewlett Packard (HP) Australia, Specialisterne and the Australian Department of Human Services (DHS) to study and promote positive employment outcomes for people with autism. During the year, the Danish company Specialisterne developed its Australian arm, Specialisterne Australia, which is based at OTARC. The first employee in Australia was Clinical Psychologist, Ms Pamela Tsiapos, who has worked with the CEO and Mr Jay Hobbs, to develop the organization in an effort to increase jobs for people with autism in Australia. These adults are then employed by HP and placed within DHS to undertake software testing. The program provided significant workplace support for employees, with implementation in Adelaide, Brisbane and Canberra.

Research Fellow, Dr. Darren Hedley leads the program with our group increasing in 2015, being joined by Dr. Jennifer Spoor and Prof. Tim Bartram for the La Trobe Business School and Associate Professor Simon Moss from Charles Darwin University. We are working together to determine the factors which engender success in the workplace, as well studying the ongoing social impact and employment benefits for people with Autism, their families, co-workers and employers. Our findings will inform how best to shape optimal work opportunities for people with Autism.



The opening of Frame of Mind 2016 was well attended.

2. Frame of Mind 2015: The Figure and Beyond

**Writer's Block Café, La Trobe University
April-May 2015**

Each year, OTARC and the La Trobe University Museum of Art (LUMA) host an art exhibition to mark World Autism Awareness Day. The 'Frame of Mind': The figure and beyond' exhibition featured the work of seven emerging and established artists with an ASD from around Australia: George Aristovoulou, Zalie Copeland, Ray David, Alise Hardy, Bobby Kyriakopoulos, Anthony Romagnano, and Tim Sharp.

The exhibition, curated by Alex Aulich and opened on April 2, 2015 by Stuart Purves AM, National Director of Australian Galleries, was well attended throughout April and May. In addition to thanking the artists, we would like to acknowledge Arts Project Australia for their involvement and support of Frame of Mind 2015.



Stuart Purves opened the exhibition



Dan Bogнар, Senior Vice President (Aust.) with Professor Dissanayake at the Salesforce Advantage Tour 2015

3. ASDetect

The development of a new mobile app to identify autism in infancy and toddlerhood: Scaling our research on early identification

The year 2015 marked the beginning of a unique partnership with Salesforce, the fifth largest IT company in the world. The Salesforce CRM underpins our operations at OTARC, and this year, under the leadership of the Senior Vice President Solutions Engineering for the Asia Pacific, Mr Dan Bogнар, and Mr Wojciech Nadachowski (our Senior Advisor for Operations and Projects), we developed an app for the early detection of autism: ASDetect. Developed for both android and iOS platforms, the app is designed for parents with children aged between 11 – 30 months. The early signs of autism incorporate within the app are based on our research on the early identification of Autism, led by Dr Josephine Barbaro. Parents view a series of videos that help them to identify the likelihood that their child is development autism. This unique app was profiled at the Salesforce Advantage tour in the Asia Pacific where Professor Cheryl Dissanayake was a keynote.



Dr Josephine Barbaro with Ms Yvonne O'Neill, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officer for Autism Queensland.

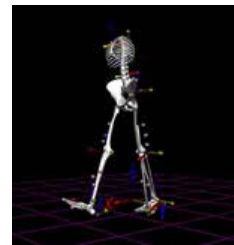
4. Staff Awards

Dr Josephine Barbaro was awarded the Inaugural Autism CRC Award for Best Translation of Autism Research at the Asia Pacific Autism Conference for her work on Social Attention and Communication Surveillance (SACS). The SACS has been translated and disseminated in many countries around the world (South Korea, China, Japan, Bangladesh, Poland), improving early identification of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake was awarded the La Trobe Vice Chancellor's 'Be the Difference' Award. The award recognizes "high performing staff who embody La Trobe's culture story and who strive to Be The Difference every day by producing outstanding results for La Trobe's students, our communities, and in support of other staff."

At the same ceremony Dr Josephine Barbaro was recognized for Supporting Research Excellence at La Trobe as part of a team who organised the Early Career Researcher (ECR) conference earlier this year.

On October 2 Professor Cheryl Dissanayake received a Serendib Gold Award in the Health and Medical Category for Inspirational Sri Lankans. Each year, the Serendib Awards celebrate and recognise Sri Lankan individuals who have made a difference in the Australian community.



5. New Grant

We are very pleased to share the great news that Dr Darren Hocking was a recent recipient of the highly prestigious ARC Discovery Early Career Researcher (DECRA) award. The scheme provides a fellowship salary and project costs with a significant investment from La Trobe University. It is designed to support the most promising early career researchers to conduct high quality basic or applied research and expand the knowledge base and research capability in Australia. Darren's project will explore developmental changes in the ability to perform cognitive and motor tasks at the same time (i.e. multitasking), and the impact of multitasking problems on learning outcomes in children.



6. Autism Undergraduate Subject (PSY3ASD)

Our semester-long undergraduate subject focused on autism was received extraordinarily well once again. Almost 400 students enrolled in this subject, making it one of the most popular subjects within the School of Psychology and Public Health. In addition, it was the most highly ranked subject in the School based on student evaluations in 2015.

Facts & Figures



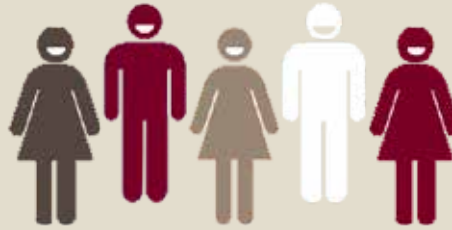
33
Publications



49
Conference
Presentations



104
Research
Collaborations
& Partnerships



290+
Volunteers
registered

2090
Facebook
Followers



55
Number of
current studies



42
Families visiting the
Early Assessment
Clinic

164
Families assessed in
the SACS program

2400
Number of research
participants on our
register

\$656,500.65



Total
Donations

Our Objectives and Achievements

Objective 1

Facilitate large and/or ongoing research projects

With the development of new research collaborations, and expansion of existing ones, we were able to increase the number of our research projects. In total we have 55 active studies, each of which is presented here, as well as the associated publications.

Research Theme 1: Identification and diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders: Early behavioural signs

We have expanded work on our Social Attention and Communication Surveillance (SACS) suite of studies both locally and overseas. SACS projects continue to run in Japan, China and Poland as well as in a number of Australian states. Other projects in this area focus on evaluating aspects of the diagnostic process.

1. Developmental surveillance for ASD (Autism CRC Project).

Researchers: **Cheryl Dissanayake, Josephine Barbaro** & the Core Project 1 Team

2. Social Attention and Communication Study-Revised (SACS-R).

Researchers: **Josephine Barbaro**, Lael Ridgway (School of Nursing and Midwifery, La Trobe University), **Cheryl Dissanayake**.

3. Early identification of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Tianjin, China.

Researchers: **Cheryl Dissanayake, Josephine Barbaro**, Chongying Wang (Nankai University) & Gongshu Liu (Tianjin Women and Children's Health Centre)

4. Barriers and enablers to the early identification of Autism Spectrum Disorders in Australia.

Researchers: **Cathy Bent, Cheryl Dissanayake & Josephine Barbaro**

5. Reducing the age of diagnosis of ASD in Nepal: SACS-N.

Researchers: **Rena Shrestha, Cheryl Dissanayake & Josephine Barbaro**

6. Social attention and communication surveillance in Warsaw, Poland.

Researchers: Joanna Kwarsiborska-Dudek (Academy of Special Education, Warsaw), Przemyslaw Tomalski (Faculty of Psychology, University of Warsaw), **Cheryl Dissanayake & Josephine Barbaro**

7. Social attention and communication surveillance in Tanaka, Japan.

Researchers: Emiko Kesuka (Gunma Prefectural Women's University), Hiroshi Miyachi (Takasaki University of Health and Welfare), Midori Okuno (Gunma Paz College), **Cheryl Dissanayake & Josephine Barbaro**

8. Early identification of Autism in Japan.

Researchers: Emiko Kesuka (Gunma Prefectural Women's University), Hiroshi Miyachi (Takasaki University of Health and Welfare), Midori Okuno (Gunma Paz College), **Cheryl Dissanayake**, Robyn Young (Flinders University), Alison Lane (University of Newcastle), **Darren Hedley & Josephine Barbaro**

9. Social attention and communication symptoms in infants at familial high risk for autism.

Researchers: **Kristelle Hudry, Josie Barbaro**, Emily Jones (Birkbeck College, University of London) & Przemyslaw Tomalski (University of Warsaw, Poland)

10. Clinician confidence during screening for Autism Spectrum Disorder in toddlers.

Researchers: **Darren Hedley**, Neil Brewer (Flinders University), Rose Nevill (Ohio State University & Nisonger Center, Columbus Ohio), & Elizabeth Kryszak, Jonathan Wilkins, Eric Butter, James A Mulick (all Nationwide Children's Hospital and Ohio State University, Columbus Ohio)

11. Approach and withdrawal in toddlers with ASD and developmental delays: Unique behavioural profiles?

Researchers: **Darren Hedley**, Professor James A Mulick (Ohio State University) & Rose Nevill (Ohio State University & Nisonger Center, Columbus Ohio)

12. Developmental surveillance for Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in early childhood education settings.

Researchers: Beth Mozolic-Staunton, Michelle Donnelly, **Josephine Barbaro**, & Jacqui Yoxall (Southern Cross University)

13. Universal surveillance and early identification of developmental disorders.

Researchers: Valsamma Eapen (University of New South Wales), Katrina Williams (Royal Children's Hospital, Department of Developmental Medicine), Bin Jaludin (University of New South Wales), **Cheryl Dissanayake & Sue Woolfenden** (Sydney Children's Hospitals Network)

Continued next page

Research Theme 2: Behavioural, motor and cognitive development

Some of the studies under this theme are focused on the impact of early diagnosis and intervention on later behavioural and cognitive functioning. Other studies investigate development of children with autism as compared with other disabilities, such as Fragile X Syndrome, Williams Syndrome, and general developmental delay in order to untangle what is specific to autism and what is not.

1. Development of infants at high genetic risk for ASD - Brain and behaviour.

Researchers: Jordy Kaufman (Swinburne University of Technology), **Kristelle Hudry & Cheryl Dissanayake**

2. The interplay between early motor deficits and later socio-communicative outcomes in children with ASD.

Researchers: **Darren Hocking**, Melanie Porter (Macquarie University), & Jessica Hopwood (Macquarie University)

3. School-age outcomes of children with ASD who received ESDM.

Researchers: **Zoe Vinen, Cheryl Dissanayake & Giacomo Vivanti**

4. School-age outcomes of children with an ASD diagnosed at age 2 years.

Researchers: **Megan Clark, Cheryl Dissanayake & Josephine Barbaro**

5. Comparing longitudinal outcomes of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder diagnosed in toddlerhood via two different referral systems

Researchers: **Felicity Peel & Cheryl Dissanayake**

6. Neurodevelopmental profiles of toddlers with ASD and developmental delay.

Researchers: **Darren Hedley**, Rose Nevill (Ohio State University & Nisonger Center, Columbus Ohio), & Jonathan Wilkins, Eric Butter, James A Mulick (all Nationwide Children's Hospital and Ohio State University, Columbus Ohio)

7. Wellbeing and emotional development in infants at high genetic risk for ASD.

Researchers: **Katherine (Kat) Crea, Kristelle Hudry & Cheryl Dissanayake**

8. Acoustic analysis of vocalisations of toddlers with ASD and developmental delay.

Researchers: **Darren Hedley** & Neil McLachlan (Music and Auditory Neuroscience Laboratory, University of Melbourne)

9. Verbal and non-verbal communication interaction in pretend play with children with autism.

Researchers: Susan Douglas (University of Melbourne), Lesley Stirling (University of Melbourne) & **Cheryl Dissanayake**

Research Theme 3: Biological markers of ASD: Genetic markers and hormonal influences

This year we commenced data collection for the Australian Autism Biobank, which is one of the major CRC projects to investigate genotypic and phenotypic features of autism. As well we are involved in research on the genetic and hormonal markers in mouse models of autism, and in children and adults with autism and other conditions.

1. Australian Autism Biobank (Autism CRC Project)

Researchers: Andrew Whitehouse (Telethon Kids Institute, University of Western Australia), **Cheryl Dissanayake**, Valsamma Eapen (University of New South Wales) & Honey Heussler (University of Queensland)

2. Investigating the genetics of co-morbid anxiety and insomnia in Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Researchers: **Amanda Richdale**, Greg Somers, Matthew Hale, John Lesku, **Cheryl Dissanayake** & Stephen Kent (School of Psychology and Public Health, La Trobe University)

3. Serotonergic systems, anxiety and insomnia in a model of autism spectrum disorder.

Researchers: Matthew Hale (School of Psychology and Public Health, La Trobe University), John Lesku (School of Life Sciences, La Trobe University), **Amanda Richdale**, Stephen Kent (School of Psychology and Public Health, La Trobe University) & **Cheryl Dissanayake**

4. Cortisol and Oxytocin in young children with ASD.

Researchers: **Kitty Ying Wan**, Stephen Kent (School of Psychology and Public Health, La Trobe University) & **Cheryl Dissanayake**

Continued next page

5. The role of oxytocin in social cognitive deficits in young adults with autism, Williams syndrome and social anxiety disorder.

Researchers: **Darren Hocking, Giacomo Vivanti**, Melanie Porter (Macquarie University), Naomi Bishop (School of Life Sciences, La Trobe University), Teresa Iacano (La Trobe Rural Health School), Izelle Labuschagne (Australian Catholic University), Mark Williams (Macquarie University), Ron Rapee (Macquarie University), Quincy Wong (Macquarie University), **Cheryl Dissanayake** & Stephen Kent (School of Psychology and Public Health, La Trobe University)

6. Prenatal and early postnatal risk factors in ASD.

Researchers: Andrew Whitehouse (Telethon Kids Institute, University of Western Australia), Murray Maybery (University of Western Australia), **Cheryl Dissanayake**, Martha Hickey (Royal Women's Hospital, University of Melbourne) & Craig Pennell (University of Western Australia)

7. Methylation markers for early diagnosis and treatment of Fragile X Syndrome and related conditions.

Researchers: David Godler (Murdoch Children Research Institute), Howard Slater (Murdoch Children Research Institute), David Amor (Murdoch Children Research Institute), **Cheryl Dissanayake**, Lesley Bretherton, **Nusrat Ahmed** & Minh Bui (University of Melbourne)

Research Theme 4: Focus on families

A child with autism can present significant challenges for families and carers, and efficient practical and emotional support can assist them to cope with these challenges better enabling them to support their child. The studies under this research theme are aimed at exploring family experiences and evaluating various support programs. As well we are studying the parenting needs of parents who themselves have autism symptoms.

1. Comparing family wellbeing in families whose children were diagnosed in toddlerhood via two different referral systems

Researchers: **Deniz Obligin, & Cheryl Dissanayake**

2. An exploratory study of the impact of autism symptoms on parenting

Researchers: **Natasha Kolivas, Lindsay Pamment, Amanda Richdale & Cheryl Dissanayake**

3. Development and evaluation of a Family Support Program for newly diagnosed children with an ASD.

Researchers: **Stacey Rabba, Cheryl Dissanayake & Josephine Barbaro**

4. Evaluating Australian community-based support for families with young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Researchers: **Kristelle Hudry, Cheryl Dissanayake**, Peter Sivey (La Trobe Business School), **Wojciech Nadachowski, Giacomo Vivanti, Megan Grant, Ru Ying Cai & Jackie Maya**

Research Theme 5: Learning and teaching: Understanding learning and educational interventions

We are continuing our important work on how young children with autism learn, with an emphasis on exploring individual differences. This knowledge will lead to the development of more effective teaching strategies and improvements in current early intervention programs. We are also continuing to evaluate the Early Start Denver Model at the Victorian ASELCC with an exciting addition to this research program this year, an RCT study on the effectiveness of the ESDM in mainstream settings. We are comparing the gains made by children receiving ESDM intervention while integrated within the mainstream childcare centre to those made by children receiving the ESDM in an autism specific childcare setting.

1. Early learning and intellectual development in autism

Researchers: **Peter Fanning, Giacomo Vivanti, Darren Hocking & Cheryl Dissanayake**

2. Social learning and imitation in children with ASD

Researchers: **Giacomo Vivanti & Cheryl Dissanayake**

3. Evaluation of the Early Start Denver Model in a group setting

Researchers: **Giacomo Vivanti, Cheryl Dissanayake**, Sally Rogers (MIND Institute at UC Davis, USA) & the Victorian ASELCC Team

Continued next page

4. Comparing learning outcomes of preschoolers with Autism Spectrum Disorder in inclusive versus segregated settings: Testing a new model of early intervention delivery at the Victorian Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre.

Researchers: **Giacomo Vivanti**, Ed Duncan, **Cheryl Dissanayake** & the Victorian ASELCC Team

5. Predictors of early intervention outcomes

Researchers: **Giacomo Vivanti**, **Cheryl Dissanayake** & David Trembath (Griffith University)

6. Multi-site randomized controlled trial of an iPad app to complement therapy for children with autism spectrum disorder: The TOBY trial.

Researchers: Andrew Whitehouse (Telethon Kids Institute and University of Western Australia), Svetha Venkatesh (Deakin University), Dennis Moore (Monash University), **Amanda Richdale**, David Trembath (Griffith University), Angelika Anderson (Monash University), and others

Research Theme 6: Related conditions: Sleep and other difficulties

Many children and adults with autism have sleep and anxiety problems which can severely affect their everyday lives. It is important to understand the causes of these additional conditions so that effective treatments can be found. An important study is one by PhD scholar Emma Baker who is investigating the roles of melatonin, cortisol and psychopathology in sleep disturbance amongst adolescents and adults with ASD.

1. Predictors of anxiety in young children and adults with autism.

Researchers: **Heather J. Nuske**, **Darren Hedley**, **Mirko Uljarević**, **Amanda Richdale**, & **Cheryl Dissanayake**

2. Does circadian rhythm disturbance explain insomnia in adults with high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder?

Researchers: **Emma Baker**, **Amanda Richdale** & Agnes Hazi (School of Psychology and Public Health)

3. The influence of bedding on sleep in children aged 8 to 10 years.

Researcher: **Amanda Richdale**

Research Theme 7: Success in adulthood

With the appointment of Research Fellows Drs Mirko Uljarević and Darren Hedley we have been able to expand our research program on adults with autism significantly. Several of our projects, including Autism CRC projects, concentrate on school leavers and how to support them effectively in the difficult transition from school to tertiary studies or employment. Other studies are aimed at exploring how best to support adults to find and retain gainful employment.

1. Emotion regulation in school leavers with Autism Spectrum Disorder and its relationship with post-school outcomes.

Researchers: **Ru Ying Cai**, **Amanda Richdale** & **Mirko Uljarević**

Funding: Autism CRC

2. Successful employment outcomes for people with ASD.

Researchers: **Darren Hedley**, **Cheryl Dissanayake**, **Amanda Richdale** & **Mirko Uljarević**

3. Comprehensive and unique profile of Australian school leavers with ASD.

Researchers: **Amanda Richdale**, **Ru Ying Cai** & **Mirko Uljarević**, Torbjorn Falkmer (Curtin University), Nick Lennox (The University of Queensland), Julian Trollor (University of New South Wales)

4. Optimising recruitment and retention for longitudinal research.

Researchers: Debra Costley (Aspect NSW), Trevor Clarke (Aspect NSW), Torbjorn Falkmer (Curtin University), **Amanda Richdale** & Kate Sofronoff (University of Queensland)

Continued next page

5. Longitudinal study of adults with ASD.

Researchers: Julian Troller (The University of New South Wales), Nick Lennox (The University of Queensland), Torbjorn Falkmer (Curtin University), **Amanda Richdale & Mirko Uljarević**

6. Finding a place in the workplace and in the community: Development and testing of an Educational Vocational Assessment Protocol (EVAP) and an Integrated Employment Success Tool (IEST).

Researchers: Torbjorn Falkmer (Curtin University), Julian Troller (The University of New South Wales), Nick Lennox (The University of Queensland), **Amanda Richdale & Mirko Uljarević**

7. Health and wellbeing for adults.

Researchers: Nick Lennox (University of Queensland), Julian Troller (University of New South Wales), Torbjorn Falkmer (Curtin University), **Amanda Richdale & Mirko Uljarević**

8. Painting a picture: Profiles of school leavers with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Researchers: **Ru Ying Cai, Amanda Richdale & Cheryl Dissanayake**

9. Exploring the presentation and experience of anxiety in individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in their transition from high school to adulthood: A qualitative study.

Researchers: **Andrew Halim, Amanda Richdale & Mirko Uljarević**

10. Factors affecting sleep in school leavers with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Researchers: **Kate Miller, Amanda Richdale & Mirko Uljarević**

11. Anxiety in school leavers: The role of intolerance of uncertainty, worry, ASD traits and repetitive behaviours.

Researchers: **Anshula Pem, Amanda Richdale & Mirko Uljarević**

12. Transition from school to adult life for young people with ASD and their families.

Researchers: **Mirko Uljarević & Ru Ying Cai**

13. Cognitive profiles associated with STEM occupations in autism: Is there really an autism advantage?

Researchers: **Eva Laurent, Amanda Richdale, Darren Hedley & Cheryl Dissanayake.**

Publications

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- Senju, A., Verneti, A., Ganea, N., **Hudry, K.**, Tucker, L., Charman, T. & Johnson, M.H. (2015). Early social experience effects the development of eye gaze processing. *Current Biology*, *25*, 3086-3091. DOI 10.1016/j.cub.2015.10.019
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- Trembath, D., **Vivanti, G.**, Iacono, T., **Dissanayake, C.** (2015). Accurate or assumed: Visual learning in children with ASD. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *45*, 3276–3287. DOI 10.1007/s10803-015-2488-4
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- Vivanti, G.** & Salomone, E. (2015). Autism Spectrum Disorders. *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences* (2nd ed., pp.275-281). Elsevier. DOI 10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.23230-3
- Vivanti, G.** & Pagetti, D. (2015). Italy and Autism. In F. Volkmar. *The encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders*.
- Williams, K., Brignell, A., **Prior, M.**, Bartak, L., and Roberts, J. (2015). Regression in autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Pediatrics and Child Health*, *51*, 61-64. DOI 10.1111/jpc.12805
- Accepted for publication**
- Baker, E. K. & Richdale, A. L.** (2015 in press). Sleep patterns in adults with a diagnosis of high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Sleep*.
- Cai, R. Y. & Richdale, A. L.** (2015 in press). Educational experiences and needs of higher education students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *46*, 31-41.
- Harrop, C., Green, J., **Hudry, K.** & the PACT Consortium (2015 in press). Play complexity and toy engagement in pre-schoolers with Autism Spectrum Disorder: Do girls and boys differ? *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*.
- Hedley, D.** (2015, in press). Peer commentary on "A new interactive screening test for Autism Spectrum Disorders in Toddlers" by R. Choueiri & S. Wagner. *The Journal of Pediatrics: Current Best Evidence*, *168*, 255-256. [http://www.jpeds.com/article/S0022-3476\(15\)01314-1/pdf](http://www.jpeds.com/article/S0022-3476(15)01314-1/pdf)
- Hudry, K., Uljarevic, M., Rumney, L., Porter, N., & Kam, R.** (2015 in press). The effects of bilingual exposure for children with autism spectrum disorders: Current knowledge and future directions. In S. Grucza, M. Olpińska, P. Romanowski (Eds.) *Bilingual landscape of the contemporary world*. Frankfurt, Germany: Peter Lang GmbH International Academic Publishers.
- Randall, M., Sciberras, E., Brignell, A., **Ihsen, E.**, Efron, D., **Dissanayake, C.** & Williams, K. (2015 in press). Autism Spectrum Disorder: Presentation and prevalence in a nationally representative Australian sample. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*.
- Uljarević, M.**, Carrington, S., & Leekam, S. R. (2015 in press). Brief Report: Effects of sensory sensitivity and intolerance of uncertainty on anxiety in mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*.
- Young, N., Hudry, K.**, Trembath, D., **Vivanti, G.** (2015 in press). Children with autism show reduced information seeking when learning new tasks. *American Journal on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*.

Conference Presentations

(in chronological order)

24 March

Conference “Progetto Michelangelo”, University of Pisa, Italy

Vivanti, G. *Imitation and joint attention in autism.* (Invited Keynote Address)

28 March

International conference “Light it Blue – Autism Awareness Day”, Lugano, Switzerland

Vivanti, G. *Early intervention in autism: Ethical issues and effectiveness.* (Invited Keynote Address)

2 April

World Autism Awareness Day Conference, Rome, Italy

Vivanti, G. *Learning in Autism: Bridging the gap between research and practice.* (Invited Keynote Address)

1-3 April

Gatlinburg Conference, New Orleans, USA

Nevill, R., **Hedley, D.**, Fields, N., Wilkins, J., Mulick, J., & Butter, E. (2015). *Comparisons of language profiles in toddlers with Autism Spectrum Disorder, language disorder, and developmental delay.* (Poster)

19-24 April

IEEE International Conference on Audio, Speech and Signal Processing (ICASSP), Brisbane, Australia

Guha, T., Yang, Z., Ramakrishna, A., Grossman, R., **Hedley, D.**, Lee, S., & Narayanan, S. *On quantifying facial expression-related atypicality of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.* (Oral presentation)

13-16 May

International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR), Salt Lake City, Utah, USA



Dr Kristelle Hudry presenting at IMFAR 2015.

Keynote Panel Session: Social Learning Processes Underlying Treatment-Related Changes in Children with ASD Receiving the Early Start Denver Model.

Vivanti, G. *Responses to early intervention and mechanisms of change.*

Special Interest Group: Implementing and Evaluating Community-Based Early Intervention. - Chairs: Dr Kristelle Hudry & Dr Giacomo Vivanti

Discussions focused on progress made to-date in conducting community-based evaluation studies of ASD early-intervention, and considered the methodological difficulties and successes encountered. A plan for a strategic way forward for the field was also discussed.

Panel Session: Understanding Early Dyadic Interaction in ASD. – Chair: Dr Kristelle Hudry

Oral Presentations

Hudry, K., Grant, M., Bedford, R., Pasco, G., Slonims, V., Green, J., Elsabbagh, M., Johnson, M.H. & Charman, T. *A longitudinal examination of parent-child interaction in the context of toddlers at high-risk of autism.*

Barbaro, J. & Dissanayake, C. *Early ASD surveillance and screening: Universal developmental surveillance for Autism Spectrum Disorders in infants and toddlers using the Social Attention and Communication Study-Revised (SACS-R).*

Evans, D.W. & **Uljarević, M.** *Repetitive and restricted behaviours in the general population: Validation and heritability of two new instruments for parents and children.*

Posters

Clark, M., Barbaro, J. & Dissanayake, C. *The Social Attention and Communication Study: A school age follow-up.*

Bent, C.A., Dissanayake, C. & Barbaro, J. *Mapping the diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorders by age 7 in Australia: 2010 – 2012.*

Dissanayake, C., Mcstay, R. & Trembath, D. *Raising a child with Autism: A developmental perspective on parental adaptation.*

Ozturk, Y., **Dissanayake, C. & Vivanti, G.** *Well-being of mothers of preschoolers with autism is mediated by their children's treatment-related improvements in every-day communication.*

Hocking, D.R. & Vivanti, G. *Dissociable components of imitation underlie learning abilities in autism versus William Syndrome and mediate treatment outcomes.*

Hocking, D.R. & Vivanti, G. *Evidence for specificity of visuomotor sequencing deficits and relation to cognitive outcomes in autism and Williams Syndrome.*

Continued next page

Conference Presentations

(in chronological order) - continued

International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) continued

Baker, E.K. & Richdale, A.L. Chronic sleep reduction and psychopathology symptoms in adults with high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Baker, E.K. Richdale, A.L. & Soliman, D. Sleep problems in Autism Spectrum Disorders: The influence of anxiety, restricted and repetitive behaviours and intolerance of uncertainty.

Nuske, H.J., Vivanti, G. & Dissanayake, C. No evidence of emotion dysregulation or aversion to mutual gaze in pre-schoolers with autism – an eye-tracking pupillometry study.

Hocking, D.R. & Vivanti, G. Dissociable components of imitation underlie learning abilities in autism versus William Syndrome and mediate treatment outcomes.

16 June

Future Horizons, NDCO One Day Autism Conference, Hobart, Tasmania

Sadka, N. It's time to wake up – Choice and control under the NDIS. (Oral presentation)

10-12 September

Australia Pacific Autism Conference (APAC)

Invited Keynote Address

Gao, Y. When autism meets ancient oriental wisdoms.

Oral Presentations

Dissanayake, C. Developmental surveillance for Autism: Prospective identification of Autism in infants and toddlers.

Barbaro, J. The development and efficacy of a family support package for parents of newly diagnosed children with Autism.

Richdale, A. Supporting young people in tertiary education.
Baker, E. The relationship between sleep, melatonin and cortisol levels in adults with high-functioning autism.

Barbaro, J. Universal developmental surveillance for Autism in infants and toddlers using the Social Attention and Communication Study-Revised (SACS-R).

Uljarević, M. Measuring repetitive and restricted behaviours in children and adults: Heritability and validation of two new instruments.

Hudry, K. Very early intervention for infants at high-risk of autism.

Nuske, N. No evidence of emotional dysregulation or aversion to mutual gaze in preschoolers with autism: An eye-tracking pupillometry study.

Bent, C. Community characteristics associated with age of diagnosis of ASD in two Australian states.

Bent, C. Child and family characteristics associated with age of first concerns and age of diagnosis of ASD.

Hudry, K. (Why) do parents interact differently with children with ASD?

Gao, Y. A parent's journey.

Rabba, S. The development of a Family Support Package for parents following a child's diagnosis of Autism: What do parents want?

Ahmed, N. Self-reported stress in parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Downs Syndrome and typically developing children: Findings from Bangladesh.

3 November

International Conference on Autism, Zhejiang University of Technology, Hangzhou, China

Richdale, A. Autism and comorbid conditions. (Invited Keynote Address)

6 - 8 November

International Meeting for Autism Research - Regional, Shanghai, China

Invited Keynote Address

Dissanayake, C. Social Attention and Communication Surveillance (SACS): Prospective identification of Autism in Toddlers.

Oral Presentations

Uljarević, M., Cai, R.Y. & Richdale, A. Predicting anxiety in parents of adolescents and young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD): The contribution of parental individual characteristics, coping styles and levels of social support.

Posters

Cai, R.Y., Uljarević, M. & Richdale, A. The relationship between habitual emotion regulation, anxiety, and depression in adolescents and young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Baker, E. & Richdale, A. Circadian rhythm sleep wake disturbances in high-functioning adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Continued next page

Conference Presentations

(in chronological order) - continued

9 November

Science Meeting, Center for Autism Research, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, USA

Nuske, H., Hedley, D., Vivanti, G., Hudry, K., & Dissanayake, C. *The see-saws of emotional reactivity and regulation in pre-schoolers with Autism.* (Oral Presentation)

25 November

Amaze (Autism Victoria) Autism Spectrum Disorder Research Forum, Darebin Arts & Entertainment Centre, Preston

Oral Presentations

Bent, C., Dissanayake, C. & Barbaro, J. *Impact of the DSM-5 on Autism diagnoses in Australia.*

Rabba, S., Dissanayake, C. & Barbaro, J. *The development of a family support package for parents following a child's diagnosis of ASD: What do parents want?*

Vivanti, G. *Imitation difficulties in ASD.*

Richdale, A. *Poor sleep is a health hazard.*

Hedley, D., Dissanayake, C., Richdale, A., Uljarević, M., & Spoor, J. *The Dandelion Project: Employing talented adults on the Autism Spectrum.*

Posters

Baker, E., Richdale, A., Hazi, A. & Prendergast, L. *Hyper-arousal and anxiety underlying sleep problems in individuals with ASD.*

Clark, M., Dissanayake, C. & Barbaro, J. *Continuity and change in autism severity and cognition from toddlerhood to middle childhood.*

Hedley, D., Uljarević, M., Nevill, R., Kryszak, E., Mulick, J., & Brewer, N. *The relationship between confidence, accuracy and child characteristics for clinician's screening for ASD in toddlers.*

Maya, J. & Hudry, K. *Coping and mental health in minority status mothers with young children with ASD.*

Research Grants

Ongoing research grants

National Health and Medical Research Council Project Grant (2011-2015) – Prenatal and early postnatal risk factors in ASD – Whitehouse, A., Maybery, M., [Dissanayake, C.](#), Hickey, M. & Pennell, C.

The Apex Foundation Trust for Autism (2012-2015) – Circadian rhythm dysfunction in adults with high-functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder: Evidence from dim-light melatonin onset – PhD student award to [Emma Baker](#), supervised by [Richdale, A.](#) & Hazi, A.

Australian Research Council Linkage Projects Scheme (2012-2016) - Enhancing learning capacity and academic outcomes using novel game technology in primary school children with developmental disabilities - Cornish, K., Gray, K., [Hocking, D.](#), Ellis, K., Harcourt, J. & McIntosh, K.

The William and Vera Houston Memorial Trust (2013-2015) - Parenting and child outcomes: An exploratory study of the impact of autism symptoms - [Dissanayake, C.](#) & [Richdale, A.](#)

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

Playgroup Australia (2014-2015) - Strengthening PlayConnect: Expert advice and current service evaluation - [Hudry, K.](#), [Nadachowski, W.](#) & [Dissanayake, C.](#)

La Trobe University Research Focus Area ‘Building Healthy Communities’ (2014-2015) - Translating autism research excellence to a regional service through Telehealth - Iacono, T., [Hudry, K.](#), Hulme-Chambers, A., Erickson, S., Trembath, D. & McConnachie, S.

Macquarie University Research Development Grants (2014-2015) - The role of oxytocin in modulating anxiety and social behaviour in neurodevelopmental and anxiety disorders - Porter, M., [Hocking, D.](#), Wong Q., Williams, M., Rapee, R., [Dissanayake, C.](#), Kent, S.

Autism CRC Core Program 1 (2014-2017) - Project 1.001RC, Base Resources Project - Whitehouse, A., [Dissanayake, C.](#), Eapen, V. & Heussler, H.

Autism CRC Core Program 1 (2014-2015) - Project 1.002RC, Creation of Autism Biobank - Whitehouse, A., [Dissanayake, C.](#), Eapen, V. & Heussler, H.

Autism CRC Core Program 1 (2014-2017) - Project 1.005RC, Developmental Surveillance for ASD - [Dissanayake, C.](#) & [Barbaro, J.](#)

Autism CRC Core Program 1 (2014 -2017) – Project 1.022RC, Family Support Program – [J. Barbaro](#) & [C. Dissanayake](#)

Autism CRC Core Program 3 (2014-2017) - Project 3.012RC, Base Resources Project – [Richdale, A.](#), Falkmer, T., Lennox, N. & Troller, J.

Autism CRC Core Program 3 (2014-2017) - Project 3.016RC, Unique ASD Profile School Leavers - [Richdale, A.](#), Falkmer, T., Lennox, N. & Troller, J.

Veski Victorian Fellowships (2014-2015) - Training on brain imaging and psychophysiology techniques for application with infants/toddlers with autism - [Nuske, H. J.](#)

New research grants

Hewlett Packard Australia (2015-2018) - Successful employment outcomes for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder - [Dissanayake, C.](#), [Richdale, A.](#), [Hedley, D.](#) & [Uljarevic, M.](#)

National Disability Insurance Scheme (2015 - 2016) - Benefits of inclusion for children with ASD - [Vivanti, G.](#), Duncan, E. & [Dissanayake, C.](#)

La Trobe University Research Focus Area ‘Understanding Disease’ (2015 - 2016) - Understanding the role of oxytocin in shaping social affiliation and social processing in young children with autism and Williams syndrome - [Hocking, D.](#), [Vivanti, G.](#), Bishop, N., Iacono, T., [Dissanayake, C.](#) & Kent, S.

La Trobe University Research Focus Area ‘Understanding Disease’ (2015) - Restoring normal function in a mouse model of autism spectrum disorder – Hale, M., Lesku, J., Kettle, C., Kent, S., [Richdale, A.](#) & [Dissanayake, C.](#)

Pierce Armstrong Foundation (2015) - Development of an emotional regulation intervention for young children with autism or developmental delays - [Nuske, H.](#)

Australian Catholic University Research Funding (2015) - A neurobiological comparison of social cognitive deficits in young adults with neurodevelopmental and anxiety disorders - Labuschagne, I. & [Hocking, D.](#)

Other grants

The William Buckland Foundation (2012-2015) - Early Diagnostic Clinic for Autism Spectrum Disorders – [Dissanayake, C.](#) and the EDC Team.

OTARC Meetings

The OTARC Advisory Committee

This Committee (See page 39) met three times during 2015 to assist in guiding the direction and operation of the Centre.

- 27 March
- 3 June
- 25 September (followed by the Annual General Meeting)
- 11 December (this meeting was deferred until 19 February 2016)

Lab Meetings

OTARC Students met monthly with the Laboratory Manager, Carmela Germano, and relevant staff, to address their ongoing work and research needs.

Monthly Staff Meetings

A meeting of all OTARC staff (research and administrative staff) is held monthly to discuss operational matters and needs. The administrative staff members meet weekly to address issues arising related to administration.

OTARC researchers meet separately on a monthly basis to focus on research ideas, directions and needs.

Monthly Research Seminars:

27 March

Dr Naomi Bishop,
School of Life Sciences, La Trobe University.
Autism: Thinking outside the [brain] box.

Three of Dr Bishop's PhD candidates also presented:

- Oonagh BODIN. *The role of gut microbiota in autism.*
- Anya SHINDLER. *Single nucleotide polymorphisms and gut dysfunction in autism.*
- Rosie DONALDSON. *Understanding comorbid medical conditions in autism.*

17 April

Dr Oriane Landry, School of Psychology and Public Health,
La Trobe University.
Visual orienting in autism and the broader autism phenotype.

1 May

Dr Tim Smith, Psychological Sciences, Birkbeck,
University of London, UK.
Individual differences in the development of eye movement control.

Dr Rachael Bedford, Institute of Psychiatry,
Kings College London, UK.

Modelling development: Social and non-social attention in infants at risk for ASD.

5 June

Associate Professor Peter Enticott,
School of Psychology, Deakin University.
How can cognitive neuroscience advance our understanding of autism spectrum disorder?

24 July

Dr Cathy Marraffa, Developmental Medicine, MCRI
Medical causes of autism.

4 August

Dr Cherie Green, Melbourne Brain Centre,
University of Melbourne
Genetic findings in ASD.

18 September

Dr Katherine Johnson, Developmental Psychology,
The University of Melbourne
Mental rotation, response inhibition, and sustained attention in ASD.

16 October

Dr Santoshi Halder, Assistant Professor and Endeavour
Australian, India Education Council Research Fellow
Disability, Inclusion and Culture: Indian Scenario.

21 October

Professor Robert D. Austin,
Management of Creativity and Innovation
Department of Management, Politics, and Philosophy
Copenhagen Business School
The Dandelion Principle: Rethinking People Management to Access Talent from Non-Traditional Sources and Activate Innovative Organizational Capabilities.

13 November

Dr Giacomo Vivanti, OTARC
Social Learning Processes underlying Treatment-Related Changes in Children with ASD Receiving the Early Start Denver Model.

4 December

Professor Grace Baranek, Associate Chair for Research,
Department of Allied Health Sciences, University of North
Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA
PEARLS research studies - the team's recent research on early identification and early intervention studies.

Lab Meetings

March 13, 2015
Ethics Applications, Budgets, and related documentation
Facilitator: Megan Clark

April 10, 2015
Research Proposal and/or Literature Review
Facilitator: Megan Clark and Carmela Germano

May 29, 2015
Tips for surviving the hell that is Psychology Honours and first year Postgraduate studies
Facilitators: Peter Fanning and Zoe Vinen

June 19, 2015
Participant Recruitment (and Salesforce Study Management tips)
Facilitators: Emma Baker and Megan Grant

July 31
Data entry and data analyses
Facilitators: Carmela Germano

August 28
Write up (Theses, Chapters, Papers)
Facilitators: Cathy Bent

Objective 2

Facilitate collaboration with other research centres, both nationally and internationally

With new staff come new research collaborations and the list of our collaborators, both in Australia and overseas, has grown significantly this year. We are very grateful for their contribution to our research. Our productive collaboration with colleagues from the Autism CRC is also continuing and an update on CRC activities follows later. This year we have also expanded our partnerships with service and industry organisations.

Research Collaborators

1. Collaborators at La Trobe University

- **Professor Tim Bartram**, La Trobe Business School
- **Professor Edith Bavin**, School of Psychology and Public Health
- **Dr Alana Hulme Chambers**, La Trobe Rural Health School
- **Ms Agnes Hazi**, School of Psychology and Public Health
- **Professor Teresa Iacono**, Head of La Trobe Rural Health School
- **Associate Professor Stephen Kent**, School of Psychology and Public Health
- **Dr John Lesku**, School of Life Sciences
- **Associate Professor Seng Loke**, School of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences
- **Dr Peter Sivey**, La Trobe Business School
- **Dr Jennifer Spoor**, La Trobe Business School
- **Dr Torab Torabi**, School of Engineering and Mathematical Sciences

2. Victorian Collaborators

- **Dr Angelika Anderson**, Faculty of Education, Monash University
- **Associate Professor Lesley Bretherton**, School of Psychological Sciences, Royal Children's Hospital and The University of Melbourne
- **Dr Minh Bui**, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne
- **Associate Professor Jeffrey Craig**, Early Life Epigenetics, Department of Paediatrics, University of Melbourne
- **Dr Susan Douglas**, School of Languages and Linguistics, University of Melbourne
- **Dr Patricia Eadie**, Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne, and Royal Children's Hospital
- **Dr Diane Jacobs**, School of Allied Health, Australian Catholic University
- **Dr Jordy Kaufman**, Swinburne Brain Sciences Institute, Swinburne University of Technology
- **Dr Izelle Labuschagne**, Faculty of Health Sciences, Australian Catholic University.
- **Associate Professor Neil McLachlan**, School of Psychological Sciences, University of Melbourne
- **Professor Dennis Moore**, Faculty of Education, Monash University
- **Professor Sheena Reilly**, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, University of Melbourne, and Menzies Health Institute Queensland, Griffith University, Queensland.
- **Professor Svetha Venkatesh**, Director of the Centre for Pattern Recognition and Data Analytics, Deakin University
- **Dr Cathy Marraffa, Professor Katrina Williams, Professor Jill Sewell and Ms Amanda Brignell**, Centre for Community Child Health and Department of Developmental Medicine, Royal Children's Hospital and University of Melbourne
- **Ms Karen McKinnon, Ms Chris Stocco and Ms Kathleen Franks**, Autism Partnerships
- **Dr David Godler and Associate Professor Howard Slater**, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, University of Melbourne

3. National Collaborators

- **Dr Jill Ashburner**, Autism Queensland
- **Ms Kate Bowen**, Liverpool Hospital, Sydney
- **Professor Neil Brewer**, School of Psychology, Flinders University
- **Dr Debra Costley**, Aspect NSW
- **Professor Valsamma Eapen**, Department Infant, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, University of New South Wales
- **Professor Torbjorn Falkmer**, School of Occupational Therapy and Social Work, Curtin University
- **Dr Michael Gradisar**, Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, School of Psychology, Flinders University
- **Dr Evan Kidd**, Department of Psychology, Australian National University
- **Associate Professor Alison Lane**, School of Health Sciences, University of Newcastle
- **Professor Nick Lennox**, Queensland Centre for Intellectual and Developmental Disability, Faculty of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences, University of QLD
- **Professor Murray Maybery**, School of Psychology, University of Western Australia
- **Associate Professor Simon Moss**, Charles Darwin University, Northern Territory
- **Dr Mark Nielsen**, Department of Psychology, University of Queensland
- **Dr Jessica Paynter**, AEIOU Foundation, Queensland
- **Associate Professor Melanie Porter**, Department of Psychology, Macquarie University
- **Dr Lyndsay Quarmby**, Centre for Rural Health (CRH), School of Health Sciences, University of Tasmania
- **Dr Michelle Short**, Centre for Sleep Research, University of South Australia
- **Associate Professor Kate Sofronoff**, School of Psychology, University of Queensland
- **Dr Lauren Taylor**, School of Psychology, University of Western Australia

Continued next page

Research Collaborators *continued*

- **Professor Leanne Togher**, Senior National Health and Medical Research Council Research Fellow, University of Sydney
- **Professor Julian Trollor**, Chair of Intellectual Disability Mental Health, Head, Department of Developmental Disability Neuropsychiatry, School of Psychiatry, University of New South Wales
- **Dr Marleen Westerveld**, School of Allied Health Sciences, Griffith University
- **Professor Andrew Whitehouse**, Telethon Kids Institute, University of Western Australia
- **Associate Professor Robyn Young**, School of Psychology, Flinders University, SA
- **Autism Specific Early Learning and Child Care National Clinical Evaluation Group**, includes researchers from University of New South Wales, University of Queensland, Flinders University, Curtin University, and the University of Tasmania.
- **Parenting Research Centre and the Raising Children Network**
- **Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER)**, including **Dr Julie Kos**
- **Australian Society for Autism Research (ASFA)**

4. International Collaborators

- **Dr Rachael Bedford**, Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London, UK
- **Dr Sander Begeer**, Developmental Psychology, VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- **Dr Eric Butter**, Nationwide Children's Hospital and The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, USA
- **Dr Sarah Carrington**, School of Life & Health Sciences, Aston University, Birmingham, UK
- **Professor Tony Charman**, Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London, UK
- **Dr Kate Ellis-Davies**, Department of Psychology, University of Cambridge, UK
- **Dr Mayada Elsabbagh**, Department of Psychiatry, McGill University, Montreal, Canada
- **Professor David Evans**, Department of Psychology, Bucknell University, Lewisburg, USA
- **Professor Jonathan Green**, School of Medicine, University of Manchester, UK
- **Dr Teodora Gliga**, Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development, Birkbeck, University of London, UK
- **Dr Robert Hepach**, Department of Developmental and Comparative Psychology, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Germany
- **Professor Pat Howlin**, Institute of Psychiatry, King's College, London, UK
- **Professor Mark Johnson**, Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development, Birkbeck College, London, UK
- **Dr Emily Jones**, Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development, Birkbeck College, London, UK
- **Dr Terry Katz**, Department of Pediatrics, University of Colorado School of Medicine, Denver, USA
- **Professor Emiko Kezuka**, Gunma Prefectural Women's University, Japan
- **Associate Professor Hiroshi Miyauchi**, Takasaki University of Health and Welfare, Japan
- **Dr Midori Okuno**, Gunma Paz College, Japan
- **Dr Elizabeth Kryszak**, Nationwide Children's Hospital and The Ohio State University, Columbus, USA
- **Dr Joanna Kwasiborska-Dudek**, Department of Speech Therapy, Academy of Special Education, Warsaw, Poland
- **Professor Ann Le Couteur**, Institute of Health and Society, Newcastle University, UK
- **Professor Sue Leekam**, Chair of Autism Research, The Wales Autism Research Centre, Cardiff University, UK
- **Dr Gongsu Liu**, Director of Child Health, Tianjin Women and Children's Health Centre, Tianjin, China
- **Dr Iliana Magiati**, Department of Psychology, National University of Singapore, Singapore
- **Professor Beth Malow**, Kennedy Center, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, USA
- **Professor Helen McConachie**, Institute of Health and Society, Newcastle University, UK
- **Professor James A. Mulick**, Nationwide Children's Hospital and The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, USA
- **Professor Filippo Muratori**, Scientific Institute Stella Maris, University of Pisa, Calambrone, Italy
- **Dr Greg Pasco**, Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College London, UK
- **Professor Andrew Pickles**, Institute of Psychiatry, King's College, London, UK
- **Professor Sally Rogers**, MIND Institute, University of California, Davis in Sacramento, USA
- **Dr Atsushi Senju**, Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development, Birkbeck College, London, UK
- **Professor Kimberley Schreck**, School of Behavioral Sciences & Education, Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg, USA
- **Dr Vicky Slonims**, Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital, London, UK
- **Associate Professor Mikle South**, Emotion and Decision Making Laboratory, Brigham Young University, Utah, USA
- **Professor Elizabeth Starr**, Faculty of Education, University of Windsor, Ontario Canada
- **Dr Ming Wai Wan**, School of Medicine, University of Manchester, UK
- **Associate Professor Chongying Wang**, Medical School, Nankai University, Tianjin, China
- **Dr Jonathan Wilkins**, Nationwide Children's Hospital and The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, USA
- **Dr Kent Williams**, Nationwide Children's Hospital, Columbus, Ohio, USA
- **Autism Treatment Network, USA**

Industry and Service Partners

Salesforce.com

Salesforce.com is the world's leading CRM (Customer Relations Management) provider. Through its philanthropic arm OTARC has been the beneficiary of:

- donated and significantly price-reduced licences to a range of platforms that support our research activities;
- donated time to help build ASDetect, a mobile app based on the SACS study to help parents identify whether or not their child is at risk of developing autism.

Hewlett-Packard Australia, Specialisterne Australia Department of Human Services

OTARC has signed a research partnership with Hewlett Packard Australia and the Department of Human Services to seek to understand how having a job impacts the lives of those with ASD. The Dandelion Program project derives from a collaborative effort between these organisations and Specialisterne to train adults with autism and provide meaningful employment for them.

Department of Social Services

The DSS funds the operation and research activities at the Victorian ASELCC, and we work together on the Child and Family Outcome Strategy (CFOS).

The Centre for Developmental Medicine at the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne is a partner in our work at the Victorian ASELCC

AMAZE (Autism Victoria)

We have been working with AMAZE on a project on parenting needs in families where parents have signs of autism, and developing supports for these families.

The Parenting Research Centre and its subsidiary, the **Raising Children Network** for children with ASD.

We continue to work with the PRC and RCN in developing and reviewing content for the parents.

Playgroup Australia and its subsidiary **PlayConnect** playgroups for children with ASD

Dr Kristelle Hudry completed a project this year to evaluate PlayConnect, a program for young children with autism designed to encourage social interaction.

Maternal and Child Health Services

MCH nurses continue to be involved in the SACS research program with Dr Josepine Barbaro and Professor Cheryl Dissanayake.

Visitors to our Centre



All year
Associate Professor Lesley Stirling from the School of Languages and Linguistics at the University of Melbourne is visiting weekly to work with Professor Cheryl Dissanayake on a research project on communication during pretend play in young children with autism.



February
Associate Professor Mitch Byrne, School of Psychology, University of Wollongong



Professor Marc de Rosnay, Early Start, University of Wollongong are interested in our work in the early identification of autism.



May
Dr Tim Smith, Senior Lecturer, Psychological Sciences, Birkbeck, University of London and **Dr Rachael Bedford**, Sir Henry Wellcome Postdoctoral Fellow, Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College, London, gave presentations at OTARC's monthly seminar.



Professor Torbjorn Falkmer, Curtin University, is Leader of Autism CRC Program 3. He gave a presentation on the CRC research underway at Curtin University.



June
Bernie Finn MP, Victorian State Minister for Western Metropolitan and Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Autism Spectrum Disorder visited OTARC, the Early Assessment Clinic and the Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre. He came with Katrina Raphael, his policy advisor on autism.



Robyn Young



Alison Lane

August
Professor Emiko Kezuka (Gunma Women's University) visited OTARC accompanied by **Dr Midori Okuno** (Gunma Paz College), **Associate Professor Hiroshi Miyauchi** (Takasaki University of Health and Welfare), and **Hiroko Kawashima** (Gunma Women's University) to participate in the training delivered by **Associate Professor Robyn Young**, Flinders University, and **Associate Professor Alison Lane**, Newcastle University. Associate Professor Young provided training in the Autism Detection in Early Childhood (ADEC), an interactive play-based autism screening instrument for infants and toddlers from 12 – 36 months, and Associate Professor Lane

trained in the Test of Sensory Functions in Infants (TSFI), a measure of sensory processing and reactivity in infants from 4 – 18 months.

These training sessions were organized by **Dr Darren Hedley** as part of a joint collaborative project. Staff and students from OTARC and other La Trobe Schools also attended the two workshops.

September
Dr Yuan Gao visited OTARC to catch up with staff after the Australia Pacific Autism Conference 2015 in Brisbane.

Mr Braedan Hogan, the new Policy Manager at AMAZE visited OTARC to meet with Professor Dissanayake and familiarize himself with our research activities.



Dr Santoshi Halder, Assistant Professor in the Department of Education, at the University of Calcutta, India, is an Endeavour Australia-India Education Council Research Fellow who is visited OTARC for a period of four months. She is also a former Fulbright Nehru Senior Research Fellow. Dr Halder is collaborating with various OTARC researchers on a number of review papers and is exploring autism teaching and services in the greater Melbourne area.

October
Professor Robert D Austin, Professor, Management of Creativity and Innovation at the Department of Management, Politics, and Philosophy, Copenhagen Business School, visited our employment team to discuss the Dandelion Project and future collaboration.

Continued next page

November

Dr Steven Howard, Lecturer, Early Start Research Institute (ESRI), Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wollongong, NSW, visited OTARC and the ASELCC (Vic), and assisted us with the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being (SSTEW) Scale. This is a tool designed to assess the quality of early childhood education and care services.

4 December

Professor Grace Baranek, Associate Chair for Research in the Department of Allied Health Sciences, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA spent a fruitful day with us planning possible collaborations. She heads the Program for Early Autism Research, Leadership & Service (PEARLS) team. She also presented at our monthly seminar. (See Page 18)



OTARC staff and students with Professor Grace Baranek (seated: Second from left)

OTARC folk, out & about

January

Dr Yuan Gao, OTARC adjunct staff member, gave several presentations in China about autism and the research at OTARC. One presentation was held in Beijing for leaders of the China Mental Disability Association, including Ms Wen Hong, President of the China Disabled Person's Federation.

January to June



Dr Kristelle Hudry took six months research leave from OTARC. She was based predominantly at Swinburne University where she worked with Dr Jordy Kaufman on current and future studies.

She also visited the University of Otago in New Zealand for five weeks where she had discussions with Professor Ted

Ruffman about studies on social-cognitive and communicative development of children with ASD and typically-developing infants and toddlers. In May she attended the International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) in Salt Lake City in the US and a pre-conference workshop, The Autism Speaks Toddler Treatment Network (ASTTN). While overseas she also visited the Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development (CBCD) at Birkbeck College in London, to discuss ongoing research projects and papers with various colleagues. On her return to Australia, she stopped over in Perth to work at the University of Western Australia (UWA) with Professor Murray Maybery and Dr Lauren Taylor on the development of the Graduate Certificate in Autism Diagnosis, which is part of the Autism-CRC. She also worked with Professor Andrew Whitehouse from the Telethon Kids Institute at UWA on a funding application for a large, multi-site international research project.



and childcare workers. During his visit, Dr Vivanti was also interviewed by a local newspaper.

Pictured above: Professor Kezuka, Mr Joe Fukamachi and Dr Vivanti



July

Dr Nusrat Ahmed joined Professor Anne Le Couteur to conduct an ADOS course at Newcastle University in England.

Professor Anne Le Couteur and Dr Nusrat Ahmed



Dr Yuan Gao gave a one-day talk to a group of parents of 40 children with ASD in Langfang City of Hebei province.

August

Dr Gao gave a one-hour talk to parents of children with ASD and professionals, at the invitation of the Director of Tianjin Disable Persons Federation.

Objective 3

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

OTARC has been centrally involved in establishing two large national initiatives: The Autism CRC and ASfAR, and continues to play a key role in both.



Co-operative Research Centre for Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders

The Autism CRC is in its third year of operation. As Victoria's only essential partner, we have continued our work in "Core Program 1: A better start" on building capacity in early behavioural developmental surveillance for autism with Research Fellow Dr. Josephine Barbaro and CRC Postdoctoral fellow Dr Heather Nuske. We have also been developing supports for newly diagnosed families together with CRC PhD scholar Ms Stacey Rabba. Stacey has designed and is now researching both a website to support families with newly diagnosed toddlers and preschoolers with autism as well a clinic session for these families. Our progress on this work was presented at the Asia Pacific Autism Conference in Brisbane in September. As noted elsewhere, Dr Barbaro was awarded the inaugural Autism CRC prize for research translation at this conference. We also undertake data collection on a sub-typing project and a transition to school project at the Victorian ASELCC (with equivalent data collection underway at the NSW, Tas, QLD, WA and SA ASELCCs) in an effort to examine the behavioural outcomes of children following early intervention, and how these may differ across possible autism sub-types.

Identification of subtypes is one of the core aims in creating the Australian Autism Biobank. We have only collected phenotypic data at three of the four sites to date while awaiting for clearance of ethics processes at the Queensland Brain Institute. Biological data collection will commence in 2016. Ms Melanie Muniandy continues her role with us as the Biobank Research Officer.

Working in Core Program 3: Creating a future, Associate Professor Amanda Richdale continues to lead the longitudinal study of adolescents and adults with ASD working together with CRC postdoctoral fellow, Dr Mirko Uljaravic, and CRC PhD scholar Ru Cai. Ru's research focuses on emotion regulation in school leavers with autism and relationship with their post-school outcomes.



The Australasian Society for Autism Research

ASfAR was formally established in 2011 as a result of an OTARC initiative. Its membership has steadily grown over the years to the current 389 members, including international members from the Asia Pacific Region.

The ASfAR Annual General Meeting was held on 8 December 2015. The Executive Committee now has two new co-opted members. Dr Emma Goodall joined the committee to represent the voice of people on the autism spectrum and Dr Iliana Magiati joined as our Asia Pacific representative.

The current Executive comprises:

- Dr Trevor Clark**, President;
- Professor Cheryl Dissanayake**, Vice President;
- Associate Professor Mark Stokes**, Treasurer/Secretary;
- Professor Sylvia Rodger**, co-opted Autism CRC Representative;
- Dr Iliana Magiati**, co-opted Asia Pacific Representative;
- Dr Emma Goodall**, co-opted Autism Spectrum Representative;
- Ms Clare Holmes**, Postgraduate Student Representative;
- Professor Andrew Whitehouse**, Ordinary Member;
- Associate Professor Peter Enticott**, Ordinary Member
- Dr David Trembath**, Ordinary Member;
- Professor Valsa Eapen**, Ordinary Member;
- Professor Jacqueline Roberts**, Ordinary Member.

The next biennial meeting will take place in late 2016 in Perth, WA.

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 do so by engaging with the media as content experts as well as using social networking opportunities, and vodcasts to extend our reach.

We have over 2000 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 4000 visits each month to our Centre website [www.latrobe.edu.au/otarc] over the last year, and have in excess of 2000 research participants on our email list. We have over 6000 subscribers to our newsletter/blog.

Subscribers receive our quarterly newsletter 'Another Piece', which is distributed in a Blog format.

Media Activities

4 March

The Conversation

How to spot an Autism Spectrum Disorder in school-age children.

By [Dr Kristelle Hudry](#)

6 April

[Cathy Bent](#), OTARC PhD student, published a paper Mapping the age of diagnosis of autism in Australia: 2010 – 2012 with her supervisors [Professor Cheryl Dissanayake](#) and [Dr Josephine Barbaro](#), which received a lot of media attention.

- The Age & Sydney Morning Herald
Autism study: Diagnosis delayed by two years in most children.
By Nicki Phillips, Science Editor

- Business Insider Australia
Autism is being diagnosed late in Australian children.
By Chris Pash .
- ABC AM Radio 774
Interview with Richard Stubbs
Autism report shows delay in diagnosis for young children.

15 April

Leader Newspapers – Diamond Valley

Artists shine light on Autism.

An article promoting OTARC's '[Frame of Mind Exhibition 2015](#)' with an interview with artist Ray David, who submitted two of his works to the exhibition.

19 May

Medscape Medical News - Conference News

Developmental Surveillance Best for Early Autism Detection.

[Dr Josephine Barbaro](#) was interviewed by Pam Harrison, following her presentation at IMFAR, about the SACS.

28 May

ABC Radio National "Life Matters"

When your child with autism can't speak, how do you communicate?

[Dr Giacomo Vivanti](#) and [Dr Nancy Sadka](#) participated in this discussion which also included Ms Christine Kendall, Speech pathologist and Director of Spectrum Speech Pathology and talk-back from listeners. It was compared by Natasha Mitchell.

18 June

ABC Radio 774

The Dandelion Project.

[Professor Cheryl Dissanayake](#) was interviewed by Richard Stubbs about the Hewlett Packard and Specialisterne employment opportunity for young adults with ASD.

24 August

Channel 9 'A Current Affairs'

Living with Autism.

[Professor Cheryl Dissanayake](#) was interviewed by Tracy Grimshaw. Actor, writer and comedian John Doyle also participated in this program and talked about his experiences with his sister who has autism.

13 July

The Women's Weekly/Health website

This celebrity reckons autism can be treated with a poo transplant: Is he right?

[Professor Cheryl Dissanayake](#) was interviewed by Clair Weaver for this article and debunked celebrity chef Pete Evans' assertion about the treatment of autism with faecal transplants into the gut.

14 July

The Conversation

Could early infant screening and intervention help prevent autism?

By [Dr Kristelle Hudry](#) & Professor Andrew Whitehouse

10 September

OTARC's Dandelion Project to study and promote positive employment outcomes amongst adults with autism was mentioned in a media release by the Department of Human Services and received attention by the following media outlets:

- ARNet.com.au
Dept of Human Services expands Dandelion Program in Brisbane.
By Julie Talevski
- ITNews.com.au
DHS expands IT jobs program for young people with autism.
By Paris Cowan

Continued next page

Media Activities *continued*

October

Spectrum

Wide awake: Why children with autism struggle with sleep.

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale was interviewed by Ingfei Chen for this segment.

November

Blogposts for Open Forum

1. *Autism, early intervention and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).*

By **Dr Nancy Sadka**

2. *Autism, choice and control under the NDIS.*

By **Dr Nancy Sadka**

December

ABC Television, 7:30

Tech company HP 'thankful' for new autistic employees.

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake was quoted in this segment.

Also participating in the program were members of the Dandelion team and HP senior and support staff.

ABC Radio National 'Life Matters'

Autism and the safety of anti-depressants in pregnancy.

Natasha Mitchell interviewed **Professor Cheryl Dissanayake** for this program.

ADOS Training



Guest ADOS Trainer, Dr Vicky Slonims (third from left), joined Dr Kristelle Hudry, and Junior Trainers Dr Cherie Green and Ms Emma Baker for the September 2014 ADOS training course.

Two ADOS-2 courses were run in January and July for researchers and medical/allied health professionals. Like in previous years, Dr Kristelle Hudry coordinated and provided the training. This year a total of 14 researchers and 20 professionals participated.

The demand for this course has remained strong and as a result Dr Hudry has also worked to increase capacity for training. She is training two experienced ADOS practitioners, **Dr Cherie Green** and **Ms Emma Baker** as junior trainers. Cherie was a former PhD student at OTARC and is now a Post-doctoral Research Fellow at the Melbourne Brain Centre. She joined Kristelle as a 'Junior Trainer' in 2013 and graduated as fully qualified trainer in 2015. Congratulations to Cherie! Emma, a current PhD student at OTARC, joined training in 2014 and is expected to qualify in 2016.

Ask an Autism Researcher

In the past 12 months we have answered nearly 60 questions via our Ask a Researcher online service. The answers to the following questions were also published in our online newsletter/blog.

- Home-based programs for adults
- Is there evidence that Autism Assistance Dogs are effective for supporting children with ASD?
- When to tell a child she or he has Autism
- What is the evidence base for sensory processing interventions?

Newsletter/BLOG

Popular feature articles during the last twelve months have included:

- *Taking the OTARC method of early detection of ASD to the world: Can ASD be identified using a mobile app?*
By Wojciech Nadachowski.
- *Well-being in mothers after their child's recent ASD diagnosis.*
By Jackie Maya
- *Investigating behavioural, gastrointestinal, sleep and diet in typically developing children and children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in Australia, the United States and Bangladesh.*
By Stephanie Mertins and Associate Professor Amanda Richdale.
- *Preparing for The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) – How does it translate to people with Autism Spectrum Disorder and their families?*
By Dr Nancy Sadka
- *A busy six months on my Outside Studies Program (OSP)*
By Dr Kristelle Hudry
- *Research update for the Dandelion Project*
By Dr Darren Hedley, OTARC HP Research Fellow
- *TalentMark* By Wojciech Nadachowski
- *Imitation difficulties among children with Autism Spectrum Disorder: A social motivation or motor-execution problem?*
By OTARC Honours student, Ms Lacey Chetcuti

Talking ASD Research Online

Vodcasts

Inside the Lab #06: Early Autism and Global Knowledge Transfer

Published on Jan 12, 2015

Dr Josephine Barbaro is joined by Professor Catherine Lord (Director of the Center for Autism and the Developing Brain at Presbyterian Hospital, Weill Cornell Medical College, and Columbia University) and Dr Andy Shih (Vice President of Scientific Affairs, Autism Speaks) to discuss issues related to early identification and diagnosis of ASD, and global knowledge and resources transfer as part of Autism Speaks' Global Autism Public Health Initiative. This vodcast is also available as podcast on iTunes.

Understanding and facilitating learning in children with Autism

Published on Feb 15, 2015

Dr Giacomo Vivanti talks about his recent research on how children with autism learn and how we can improve the learning outcomes using innovative treatment approaches. Autism, more than any other neurodevelopmental disorder, impacts the ability of individuals to learn the communication skills, socialisation skills and daily living skills necessary to live an independent life, to find and maintain a job, to have friends and to have a social life.

Ray David's Mural at La Trobe University

Published on Mar 4, 2015

Dr Ray David was the first artist selected to exhibit in the *Frame of Mind* exhibition in 2014, which was organised by the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre's as part of its autism awareness campaign during the World Autism Awareness month. Following the exhibition, Ray's work was chosen to

feature as a mural at La Trobe University. Ray speaks about what his work represents and his appreciation of having the work displayed at the University.

The Autism Biobank Research Project

Published on Mar 12, 2015

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake introduces the Autism Biobank, a national signature project funded by the Autism Cooperative Research Centre (Autism CRC). OTARC is the Victorian site for collection on biological data (blood and saliva), physical measurements (incl. head circumference) and behavioural and cognitive data from children with autism aged 2 to 17 years and their parents. These data will contribute to our understanding of the many types of autism and their underlying bases.

Inside the Lab #7 Specialisterne employment model in Australia

Published on Apr 19, 2015

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, Thorkil Sonne (CEO of Specialisterne Foundation in Denmark) and Michael Fieldhouse (Accounts Executive, Hewlett Packard) discuss the Specialisterne employment model for adults with autism and its implementation in Australia. Hewlett Packard and the Federal Department of Human Services are collaborating with Specialisterne in the 'Dandelion Project' which is aimed at training and placing adults in software testing jobs. OTARC is studying the impact this has on the lives of adults with autism.

Longitudinal study for school leavers with autism

Published on May 7, 2015

Dr Mirko Uljarevic talks about his study that aims to understand the process of transitioning of young people with ASD, aged 15-25, from high-school to either higher education or vocational training. Collaborators in this study are Associate Professor Amanda Richdale and PhD scholar Ru Cai, as well as the Autism CRC. The specific aims are to identify barriers and facilitators that are associated with positive and negative

outcomes for students with ASD and their families, which will lead to the development of person-centred support programs.

The Dandelion Project: Employing adults on the autism spectrum

Published on Jun 23, 2015

Dr Darren Hedley talks about The 'Dandelion Project', a study supported by Hewlett-Packard, Australia, the Australian Government Department of Human Services (DHS) and in collaboration with Specialist People Foundation, Denmark. The project, that is looking at factors associated with successful transition to employment of adults on the Autism Spectrum who are employed by DHS as software testers. OTARC research will collect information from the adults with autism, their families, as well as their co-workers and managers to determine whether the training and employment leads to improvements in wellbeing, quality of life and self-worth, and reductions in anxiety and depression.

OTARC & Salesforce create app to help parents with early detection of autism

Published on Dec 10, 2015

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, Dr Josephine Barbaro and Mr Wojciech Nadachowski describe the development of a mobile app for the early identification of autism in children aged between 11 and 30 months. It was developed in collaboration with Salesforce.com and is based on evidence from research at OTARC. The app will enable parents to detect the early signs of autism in their children, enabling them to enrol them in early intervention, and as a result improve their chances of a more positive developmental outcome.

Continued next page

Podcasts available through iTunes U “Living with Autism”

How early can early intervention be?

Released: 19 February 2015

Dr Kristelle Hudry discusses symptoms of autism, recent studies on early identification and diagnosis, and models of early intervention for children diagnosed with autism. She goes on to discuss a ground-breaking study in the UK that looks at very early family-mediated intervention for toddlers (about 1 year old) who are at high risk of developing autism because they are the sibling of an older child diagnosed with the condition.

Stress and anxiety in adolescents with ASD

Released: 26 March 2015

Dr Mirko Uljarevic talks about the prevalence and potential causes of stress and anxiety amongst young people with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), and the effects of these on their ability to interact with other people. He also discusses how parents of children with ASDs cope with the stress and anxiety of their offspring and their own anxieties. His longitudinal study (in collaboration with Associate Professor Amanda Richdale, PhD scholar Ru Cai and the Autism CRC) on the transition of school leavers with ASD into adult life incorporates an investigation of the contribution of stress and anxiety on this transition.

Vaccines do not cause autism

Released: 1 October 2015

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake explains the evidence showing that vaccination does not cause autism as well as the origin of the misinformation about the link between vaccines and autism.

Sleep and Autism

Released: 12 November 2015

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale discusses the relationship between sleep in children with autism and typically developing children, as well as the impact of sleep difficulties on development. She also discusses a study (in collaboration with PhD scholar Emma Baker) on sleep in adults with autism.

Donations 2015

A total of \$656,544.65 was received in donations (see financial statement — Pages 36 and 37)

Principal individual donor: Mrs Olga Tennison

Other significant donors: Dr Sylvia Walton

Individual donations

Individual donors:	\$642,960.00
Organisational donations:	\$4,924.00
Everyday Hero Fundraising	\$8,600.00

Everyday Hero fundraisers

Several of our friends and colleagues raised funds for OTARC through Everyday Hero.

- **Annie Malory** participated in a Swim Classic 2015 and raised over \$1,600
- **Cassie Anersen** participated in Run Melbourne 2015 and raised over \$1,400.00
- **Drawtism 2015 fundraisers** raised over \$3,600.00
- **Yarra Plenty Swimming Club's Swimathon** raised nearly \$2,000.00

OTARC sends a heartfelt thank you to all the donors who supported everyone in their fundraising events.

Volunteering at OTARC

In 2015 OTARC had a database of 299 volunteers willing to help in various capacities. They contributed their knowledge and skills in administration, event planning, research support, and fundraising. A survey of our volunteers in May 2015 provided us with some valuable feedback.

We are grateful to the following volunteers who helped in a large number of volunteer activities throughout the last twelve months. We send a big vote of thanks to the following volunteers:

Dilan Alakoc
Jacyra Araujo
Erin Battersby
Daniel Berends
Natalie Bischof
Coree Brewster-Devlin
Lauren Cameron
Lacey Checuti
Jenny Clarke
Alana Cross
Siobhan Ede
Claire Ellul
Larissa Fogdenc
Jessica Ford

Emily Fyson
Samantha Galea
Simone Giampaolo
Ellen Hall
Gabrielle Hall
Ashlee Hancock
Lana Harris
Mark Jones (Capital University, Columbus, Ohio)
Stefanie Kabitz
Amanjit Kaur
Natasha Kolivas
Siobhan Korburt
Liz Lennox

Samantha Liistro
Shyan Low
Akanesi Lui
Amy Luu
Ayesha Maharaj
Alice Maier
Jackie Maya
Lisa McLean
Aleshia Nanev
Angie Parsons
Georgia Petrou
Kira Polonowita
Glen Rattenbury
Ruvee Ratnayake

Meg Rosse
Ensu Sahin
Stephanie Sievers
Danielle Smith
Dyna Thomas
Liv Trencher
Jess Tsoutsoulis
Pinar Uluer
Jenn Vong
Nicole Wigney
Jessica Woodhead
Alex Woollacott

Objective 5

Provide opportunities for student based research and early career mentoring programs

A total of 22 students (Honours, Masters, Doctoral, and PhD candidates) undertook their research at the Centre within the last year, with 6 of them successfully completing their research studies.

Students

PhD Candidates

Emma Baker - Supervisors: Associate Professor Amanda Richdale and Ms Agnes Hazi

Cathy Bent - Supervisors: Professor Cheryl Dissanayake and Dr Josephine Barbaro

Ru Ying Cai - Supervisors: Associate Professor Amanda Richdale

Megan Clark - Supervisors: Professor Cheryl Dissanayake and Dr Josephine Barbaro

Stacey Rabba - Supervisors: Professor Cheryl Dissanayake and Dr Josephine Barbaro

Rena Shrestha –Supervisors: Professor Cheryl Dissanayake and Dr Josephine Barbaro

Kitty Wan - Supervisors: Associate Professor Stephen Kent and Professor Cheryl Dissanayake

Doctor of Clinical Neuropsychology Candidates

Peter Fanning - Supervisors: Dr Giacomo Vivanti, Dr Darren Hocking and Professor Cheryl Dissanayake

Kavi Jayasinghe - Supervisor: Professor Cheryl Dissanayake and Associate Professor Amanda Richdale

Doctor of Clinical Psychology Candidates

Megan Grant - Supervisor: Dr Kristelle Hudry and Professor Cheryl Dissanayake

Rebecca Kam - Supervisors: Dr Kristelle Hudry and Dr Annukka Lindell

Zoe Vinen - Supervisors: Professor Cheryl Dissanayake and Dr Giacomo Vivanti

Masters of Clinical Neuropsychology/PhD

Britney Keech - Supervisors: Dr Darren Hocking and Dr Izelle Labuschagne

Master of Clinical Psychology candidates

Andrew Halim - Supervisors: Associate Professor Amanda Richdale and Dr Mirko Uljarevic

Stephanie Mertins - Supervisor: Associate Professor Amanda Richdale

Deniz Ozbilgin - Supervisors: Professor Cheryl Dissanayake and Dr Josephine Barbaro

Felicity Peel - Supervisor: Professor Cheryl Dissanayake and Dr Josephine Barbaro

Honours Candidates

Rebecca Bobin - Supervisor: Dr Darren Hocking

Lacey Chetcuti - Supervisor: Dr Kristelle Hudry & Dr Giacomo Vivanti

Natasha Kolivas - Supervisor: Professor Cheryl Dissanayake

Kate Miller - Supervisors: Associate Professor Amanda Richdale and Dr Mirco Uljarevic

Anshula Pem - Supervisors: Associate Professor Amanda Richdale and Dr Mirco Uljarevic

Successful Completions

Master of Clinical Psychology

Stephanie Mertins - Supervisor: Associate Professor Amanda Richdale.

Honours

All the 2015 Honours students (listed above) successfully completes their Honours year.

Objective 6

Foster knowledge transfer to practitioners within the field

We have engaged in a number of activities throughout this year to transfer knowledge to practitioners in the field, and to the community in general.

Invited Talks and Workshops

March

The Rotary Conference, Wangaratta
Professor Cheryl Dissanayake
Research at the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre.

April

Capital Institute of Pediatrics, Beijing, China
Dr Giacomo Vivanti.
Early Intervention in Autism Spectrum Disorders.

June

Psychological Services group, Perth
Dr Kristelle Hudry
ADOS in a nutshell.

June

CoAct Conference, Old Parliament House, Canberra
Wojciech Nadachowski co-presented at two panel sessions:
"The Power of Many"

- *"The Dandelion Program"* with Michael Fieldhouse, HP Australia, and Mitch Levy, Department of Human Services.
- *"Focus on Ability"* with Graeme Innes AM, Disability Discrimination Commissioner 2005-2014 and Caroline Casey, Kanchi Network, Ireland.

July

Department of Psychiatry Colloquium, Royal Melbourne Hospital
Professor Cheryl Dissanayake
Research at the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre.

Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, Germany
Dr Heather Nuske
Others' emotions teach, but not in autism.

August

Unigateway Business Breakfast
Speakers:

- **Professor Cheryl Dissanayake**
- **Dr Josie Barbaro**
- Mr Robert Newell
- Mr Mike Burnside
- **Mr Wojciech Nadachowski**

Identifying children at risk of Autism with a mobile app. Discussing the collaboration between OTARC and Salesforce.com in the development of ASDetect.

Eastern Ranges School, Ferntree Gully
Associate Professor Amanda Richdale, Dr Mirko Uljarević & Ru Ying Cai
Autism co-morbid conditions and transition from school to work or tertiary studies.

September

Early Start Pre-Conference, University of Wollongong
Professor Cheryl Dissanayake
Prospective Identification of Infants and Toddlers with Autism: Social Attention and Communication Surveillance.

October - November

Salesforce Advantage Tour, Sydney, Brisbane, Singapore, Melbourne, Auckland
Professor Cheryl Dissanayake
Discussing the collaboration between OTARC and Salesforce.com in the development of ASDetect.

National University of Singapore, Singapore
Professor Cheryl Dissanayake
Social Attention and Communication Surveillance (SACS): Prospective identification of Autism in Toddlers.



Dr Giacomo Vivanti's at the Li Qiao Hospital of Capital Institute of Pediatrics in China

Second Child Development and Rehabilitation New Knowledge Workshop, National Continuing Medical Education Program by Kunming Children's Hospital at Kunming, China
Associate Professor Amanda Richdale
Autism and Comorbid Conditions

APS Institute National Webinars: Understanding Autism: From older childhood to adulthood series
Associate Professor Amanda Richdale
Common comorbid conditions in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Cognitive Neuroscience Unit, Deakin University
Dr Darren Hocking
Beyond formalised assessment of cognitive motor functioning in fragile X premutation: From blunt measures to sensitive endpoints.

Victorian Centre for Biostatistics (VicBiostat)
Dr Kristelle Hudry
Parent behaviour as a mediator of skills growth for children with autism.

World Autism Awareness Day

2 April 2015

For 2015 World Autism Awareness Month OTARC screened AMAZE's short film 'Spectrospectrum' on the La Trobe Bundoora campus to raise awareness among staff and students.

Other Activities

Appointments

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake

- Editorial Boards of the Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist and Frontiers in Developmental Psychology
- Executive Committee of the Australasian Society for Autism Research (ASfAR), Vice President
- Convenor of the ASD Research Group in Victoria
- NDIA Autism Early Intervention Stakeholder Panel
- Research and Developmental Committee, CRC for Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Biobank Operations Committee, CRC for Living with Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Scientific Advisory Board, Raising Children's Network
- Clinical Evaluation Group of the National Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centres

Associate Professor Amanda Richdale

- Chair of the EPIC Early Intervention Board of Management
- APS Intellectual &/or Developmental Disabilities and Psychology Interest Group
- ASD Transition to Tertiary Studies Advisory Committee
- Section Editor, Current Developmental Disorders Reports

Dr Giacomo Vivanti

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

Dr Josephine Barbaro

- Board of Directors of the Sir Robert Menzies Memorial Foundation Limited
- Secretary of the Menzies Memorial Scholars' Association

Dr Kristelle Hudry

- Assistant Chair on a Grant Review Panel for the NHMRC Project Grants funding scheme
- A member of the Editorial Board as Associate Editor of Research in Developmental Disabilities.



Raising Children Network

OTARC staff members continue to work with colleagues from the Parenting Research Centre to create, write and review content for the Raising Children Network - Autism site. Working together, we can ensure that the relevant information is up-to-date, evidence-based, and of a high standard.



Play Connect

OTARC have continued a partnership for evaluation of the Play Connect playgroup program – part of the federally funded Helping Children With Autism Initiative.

Other Activities

Early Assessment Clinic for Autism Spectrum Disorders

By Dr Nancy Sadka, Intake Officer, Early Assessment Clinic

The Early Assessment Clinic opened its doors in June 2011 for children under the age of 36 months who were in need of a multi-disciplinary assessment for autism. A total of 286 children came to the EAC with only 42 children attending in the year 2015 due to lack of financial support. The last family attended on Thursday October 29, 2015.

The majority of "written referrals" to the EAC came from Paediatricians but families reported that the Maternal Child Health Nurses were very effective in recognizing the early signs for autism and referring the children to the Paediatricians or directly to the EAC.

Of the 286 children (206 boys and 80 girls; mean age of 27 months), 78% received a diagnosis of ASD. Seventy six percent (76%) of referred boys and 65% of referred girls met criteria for ASD. The remaining children (22%) either had a developmental and/or language delay, with all children referred in a timely manner for early intervention. The youngest child seen at our clinic was 13 months and the oldest was 36 months.

The Early Assessment Clinic, with its streamlined intake process, meant that families were seen, on average, within 10 weeks of their initial point of contact, which contributed significantly to the reduction of the waitlists in the wider community.

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

By Mr Ed Duncan, Speech and Language Therapist and Senior Coordinator of the Margot Prior Wing



The Victorian Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre (ASELCC) has had another successful 12 months. We continued to work on our core objective of continually building our research, expanding capacity in our ESDM training and working to ensure continued excellence in service provision for children with autism.

The relationship between the Victorian ASELCC and OTARC continues to support our research agenda. Dr Vivanti has again made an outstanding contribution to the autism field while working at the ASELCC. This year he oversaw the implementation of a randomized control trial at the ASELCC and Children's Centre. In this project we are investigating outcomes of children with autism who are receiving ESDM within autism specific playrooms compared to children who are receiving the ESDM within inclusive early childhood playrooms. The first stage of this project was completed at the end of 2015. The NDIA funded this study.

The centre has continued to build on its expertise in the application of the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM). Our ESDM trainers have been very active over the last 12 months and have provided training in Melbourne, France, China, and Taiwan. We have recently completed a draft manual on ESDM Group Delivery to be published in 2016.

Art Exhibition

at Carwyn Cellars, 877 High Street, Thornbury

Throughout November and December 2015 OTARC hosted the *Frame of Mind* exhibition at Carwyn Cellars, Thornbury, showcasing the work of Melbourne artist Ray David. Ray's work explores themes of Ancient Greek mythology, and chaos and order. This exhibition offers an artistic perspective to complement the strengthening body of research into Autism Spectrum Disorders. Ray also exhibited his work at the *Frame of Mind* exhibition at La Trobe University to celebrate World Autism Awareness month in 2014. The aim is to increase awareness and education on ASD, and thereby opening up discussion and support.

Exhibited artworks by Ray David included:

- *Attic child in constructed landscape* 2011
- *Attic Oedipus, Antigone and Oso* 2011
- *Attic brothers* 2009
- *Child* 2009
- *Minstrel song* 2009
- *Attic boy* 2012
- *Riddle of the sphinx* 2008
- *Ismene* 2010
- *Girl with hat* 2005
- *Girl with flowers* 2011
- *Da Vinci's Oedipus* 2009

Operations and Projects

A focus in 2015 was the development of our mobile app, ASDetect. We appointed two new members to the team – Mick Leahy as Mobile Marketing Officer and Melinda Denham as Communications Officer. The beta version of ASDetect was showcased at the Salesforce Advantage Tour in Sydney, Singapore, Melbourne, Auckland and India.

Another new project for which we received funding following our grant application to the Salesforce Foundation is TalentMark, an initiative being undertaken together with the Autism CRC and Specialisterne Australia. TalentMark is a virtual employment hub for adults with autism and will bring together jobseekers, employers, service providers and training in one central place that will allow adults with ASD to search, apply and train for employment in a customised online environment. This is the second collaborative program with Specialisterne Australia, who are also involved in our Dandelion program, as well as our second collaboration with Salesforce.com, who developed the ASDetect app. We are very grateful for their continuing and enthusiastic support of our work.

In 2015 we also redesigned the landing page of the OTARC website to bring it in line with new La Trobe design rules. The aim is to improve access by our various interest groups to the content on our site. We thank Digital Marketing for their continuing assistance and advice as we work to improve the usability of our website.

In August we ran a Drawtism campaign, together with ASPECT Australia, to raise fund for our research. Drawtism is a fun game, the brainchild of our Senior Advisor of Operations and Projects, Wojciech Nadachowski, that uses the concept of the Pictionary game, to help understand the communication

challenges faced by people with autism. That communication frustration when playing Pictionary is experienced everyday by many people of the autism spectrum, and serves to raise awareness. We raised \$3,616 thanks to those who participated in the Drawtism campaign.

Laboratory Matters

By Alexandra Aulich

In November 2015 OTARC's long term Lab Manager, Carmela Germano, resigned. I was delighted to move into this role, having worked closely with Carmela over a number of months. I am looking forward to building on her strong contributions to the Lab and its operations.

At the end of 2015 our Participant Registry sits at 2,400 individuals, with 300 new 'recruits' this year. The registry comprises children, teenagers and adults with and without autism who are interested in participating on our research. We are very grateful to all participants for their generous time and support, and for trusting us with their personal information.

Many of our registrants volunteer to join our registry while participating in studies into which they were recruited, indicating that they are happy to return to continue their participation in other studies. The 2015 survey of participants confirms this, with 89% of respondents reporting they are happy to return for another study, and 71% reporting willingness to participate more than once per year. All respondents reported having had a good experience at OTARC, and commented favourably about our researchers. We use responses to the survey to develop strategies to further improve communication and engagement with our participants.

We continue to update our Lab Manual, which can now be accessed online by students and staff. The Manual helps students and staff to familiarise themselves with OTARC operations, policies and procedures so that studies progress as smoothly as possible for all, especially the participants.

Visiting Early Career Researchers and Postgraduate Students

We also provide the opportunity for early career researchers and postgraduate students from overseas to come and work in our Centre. Over the past year we had the pleasure of welcoming one postdoctoral fellow and a postgraduate student.



Jeremy Marriott,
Doctoral student (Clinical Psychology),
Curtin University, WA



Dr Charlotte Tye,
Institute of Psychiatry,
Kings College, London, UK

The Financial Report of the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre

Preamble

This financial report is for a full calendar year, rather than a financial year as was the case previously. This is to align OTARC's financial reporting to the University's general financial reporting structures, which changed from financial year to calendar year in 2015.

The reason OTARC has reported by financial year to date was that OTARC was inaugurated in late June 2008 and the subsequent financial reports have been a legacy of that date.

In order to enact these changes, OTARC reported on the 2014 calendar year only in the financial report of the last Annual Report. In forthcoming reports we will report on the calendar year.

Revenues:		2014	2015
Commonwealth Grants - DEEWR		\$17,363	\$37,410
State Government Grants		0	0
Research Revenue		\$539,638	\$638,861
Commercial Revenue		\$97,649	\$97,840
Other Grants and Donations	* \$500K donation under research revenue	\$589,288	\$605,749
Other Revenue		\$25,917	\$1,405
Internal Revenue/Transfers		\$1,044	\$20,914
Investment Revenue	<i>Interest on monies held</i>	\$58,468	\$77,765
Total Revenue		\$1,329,363	\$1,524,943

The Financial Report of the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre

Expenditure:		2014	2015
Total Employee Benefits and on costs		\$1,275,563.71	\$1,524,930
Academic		\$716,117	\$861,453
Casual - Academic		\$244,515	\$261,459
General		\$218,475	\$267,075
Casual - General		\$129,552	\$97,890
Other salary related		- \$33,095	\$37,053
Total Non Salary Expenditure		\$226,098	\$170,664
Infrastructure Related	<i>Maintenance, services</i>	\$34,815	\$8,664
Depreciation		\$11,546	\$11,546
Professional Fees	<i>Consultancies, etc</i>	\$7,378	\$24,813
Student Related	<i>Scholarships, Stipends, Training</i>	\$27,760.	\$9,314
General Operating	<i>General Admin Costs</i>	\$55,879	\$39,508
Staff related	<i>Travel, Accommodation, Entertainment</i>	\$54,334	\$47,357
Other Expenses & Sundry Items		\$34,386	\$29,491
Total Expenses		\$1,501,661	\$1,695,594
Net Operating Result		- \$231,807	- \$170,650

La Trobe In Kind Contributions

Current Year Trading Deficit	\$170,650
School Support for Indirect Costs	\$76,218
Total	\$246,868

Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre Balance

as at 31st December 2015 - reported in cost centre 9105

Opening balance	\$1,284,715
2015 Interest	\$77,765
2015 Donations	\$35,832
Other	\$1,793
Closing Balance	\$1,396,518

Staffing and Centre Personnel

Academic and Research Staff

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, Director
Associate Professor Amanda Richdale, Principal Research Fellow
Dr Kristelle Hudry, Senior Lecturer in Developmental Psychology, School of Psychology and Public Health
Dr Elfriede Ihlen, Research Fellow
Dr Josephine Barbaro, Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Dr Giacomo Vivanti, Research Fellow, ASELCC/OTARC
Dr Darren Hocking, Research Fellow
Dr Mirko Uljarevic, CRC Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Dr Heather Nuske, CRC Postdoctoral Research Fellow
Dr Darren Hedley, HP Research Fellow
Ms Veronica Rose, Speech Pathologist, Early Assessment Clinic
Dr Nusrat Yasmeen Ahmed, ASD Specialist, Early Assessment Clinic, ASELCC & Director of the Hope Autism Center in Bangladesh.
Ms Melanie Muniandy, Biobank Research Officer

Administrative Staff

Mr Wojciech Nadachowski, Senior Advisor, Operations & Projects
Ms Lisbeth Wilks, Administrative Officer
Ms Carmela Germano, Laboratory Manager
Dr Nancy Sadka, Intake Officer, OTARC Early Assessment Clinic
Ms Alexandra Aulich, Administrative Officer
Mr Lachlan Burnside, Database Officer
Mr Peter Johansen, Administrative Assistant

Research Assistants

Anna Atkinson
Molly Buntine
Ashlee Hancock
Natasha Kolivas
Jackie Maya
Yessica Monroy-Moreno
Lindsay Pamment
Stacey Rabba

Dandelion Project Trainers

Ms Pamela Tsiapos, Employment Services Manager, Specialisterne Australia
Mr Jay Hobbs, Employment Services Manager, Specialisterne Australia

Adjunct Members

Dr Naomi Bishop - Lecturer, School of Life Sciences, La Trobe University.
Mike Burnside - Principal Sales Engineer at Salesforce.com.
Dr Philippe Chouinard - Lecturer, School of Psychology and Public Health, La Trobe University.
Dr Matthew Hale - Lecturer, School of Psychology and Public Health, La Trobe University.
Dr Yuan Gao - Independent Consultant, Beijing, China.
Amanda Golding - Amagol Consulting Services & Autism Noticeboard.
Dr Oriane Landry - Adjunct Associate Professor, School of Psychology and Public Health, La Trobe University.
Dr Lesley Stirling - Associate Professor, University of Melbourne.

Honorary Members

Dr David Trembath - Senior Lecturer, Griffith University.
Dr Cynthia Zierhut - MIND Institute, University of California, Davis in Sacramento, USA.

Governance - Advisory Committee



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

Professor Cheryl Dissanayake, Centre Director, La Trobe University

Mr Wojciech Nadachowski, OTARC Operations and Projects, La Trobe University

Associate Professor Stephen Kent, Head of School, Psychology & Public Health, La Trobe University

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

Professor Keith Nugent, DVC Research, La Trobe University

Professor Graham Schaffer, PVC, College of Science, Health and Engineering, La Trobe University

Dr Alan Watkinson, Director of Alumni and Advancement, La Trobe University

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

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

Dr Sylvia Walton, Chair ASELCC Strategic Advisory Committee, La Trobe University

Mr Clifford Picton, University Ombudsman, La Trobe University

Ms Fiona Sharkie, CEO, AMAZE

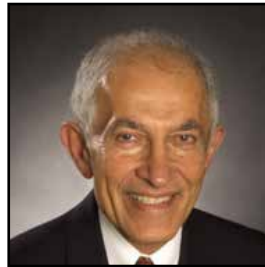
Dr Catherine Marraffa, Senior Paediatrician Developmental Medicine, Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne

Mr Tony Stein, Parent Representative



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.



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



OTARC is situated in the School of Psychology and Public Health within the College of Science, Health and Engineering (CSHE) at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia.

