

# LA TROBE'S AUTISM APPROACH GOES GLOBAL

Dr Joanna Kwasiborska, a Polish academic speech pathologist from the Warsaw Academy of Special Education and a clinician from Therapy Centre Adesse in Poland, is training in the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) at La Trobe University's Margot Prior Wing — The Victorian Autism Specific Early Learning & Care Centre (ASELCC).



The ESDM is a comprehensive behavioural early intervention approach for children with autism aged 12 to 48 months. The ASELCC provides early learning programmes and specific support to children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Located at La Trobe University, it works closely with the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (OTARC), which was established to advance knowledge of the nature and causes of ASD.

'I first heard about ESDM three years ago during my initial meeting with La Trobe autism researcher and OTARC Director, Dr Cheryl Dissanayake. The method was described as very effective and data based.

'Thanks to the training course on social attention and communication that Dr Dissanayake ran in May 2011 in Warsaw for me and my team, therapists of Adesse are now able to detect early symptoms of ASD in children as young as 8 months. This creates a need for a therapy method dedicated to such a small children,' says Dr Kwasiborska.

The ESDM model is an effective intervention method for children with ASD. Research has proven that the model improves cognitive and language abilities and adaptive behaviour.

A major improvement is seen in children with ASD who receive treatment starting at the age of 18-30 months. This model combines different approaches including ABA and pivotal response training. It's a developmental, naturalistic, and relationship based approach.

'I strongly believe that thanks to this early intervention we will be able to help children with ASD in Warsaw to achieve better outcomes in terms of IQ, language, behavioural skills, and general quality of their lives', Dr Kwasiborska says.

'One of the biggest differences between the way ASD is treated in Poland and here in Australia is the way that diagnoses are made. There are numerous therapy centres in Poland where diagnosis of ASD can be made, but there are no standardised diagnostic tools available, so each of those centres uses their own, internal tools based on criteria of International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems.

'I also collaborate with my colleague Izabela Chojnicka of the Warsaw Medical University within a grant dedicated to Polish adaptations of ADOS and ADI-R which are the current instruments for assessing and diagnosing autism and pervasive developmental disorder.

'The implementation of ASD screening tools, standardised diagnostic tools, and early intervention method that I am trying to achieve in Poland is immensely important for Polish children with ASD. This is all possible thanks to people like the specialists working at OTARC and ASELCC,' Dr Kwasiborska says.

## MORE INFORMATION

Further information on research opportunities in the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre can be found at: [latrobe.edu.au/otarc/research/index.html](http://latrobe.edu.au/otarc/research/index.html)