



achieving
with autism

Introduction

Never underestimate the power to make a difference.

When a small group of parents and supporters got together in 2006 to do something about the lack of quality autism services on the Mornington Peninsula, little did we know the impact we would have on so many families.

Less than two years later, we opened the door to our first students at Abacus Learning Centre.

Over the past seven years, more than 90 families have found their way to our service through many different paths – a referral from their child’s psychologist or another Abacus family, an occasional newspaper article, a web search, or word-of-mouth.

These families come to us from different backgrounds, different towns and even different states, often making great sacrifices along the way.

However, they share a common goal: to give their child the best chance of reaching their full potential and of living a happy and healthy life.

As every child with an autism spectrum disorder is different, so are the outcomes for our students.

For some, Abacus will mean the difference between attending a mainstream school or a

special development school. For others, Abacus gives them the ability to communicate with their families for the first time.

Through the work of Abacus, some of our students have gone on to shine at school. Others have learnt to conquer their fears and phobias, or participate more fully in family life.

While some successes at first seem more significant than others, small breakthroughs, such as the ability to take a child into a shopping centre without experiencing a meltdown can be a huge win for some families.

It’s the focus on the individual that is so vital in what we do.

With intensive behavioural intervention (ABA) at the core of our work, Abacus develops programs that meet the individual needs of each and every student.

In essence, we provide the platform for our students and their families to succeed. And there can be no better measure of an organisation’s success than that.

Lauren Moore, Executive Director



Caleb

Caleb is our rambunctious, funny, clever, kind and loving middle son.

2015 was an amazing year for Caleb at Abacus. From term one Emma and Caleb's team of therapists began teaching him the strategies, structure and skills he would need to begin school in 2016.

Despite the progress we were seeing at Abacus, Caleb's preschool teachers, paediatrician, psychologist and occupational therapist advised us on numerous occasions that he would be best suited to a special needs school. Our Abacus team believed Caleb would be better suited and more challenged at mainstream school. As parents, we were unsure of the best option for our boy.

However, once Caleb began the Abacus School Integration Program in term four, we saw huge steps forward in his confidence, socialisation and ability. It was so exciting for us to see him going off to "Abacus School" on a Wednesday morning in his uniform. He learnt many new skills like lining up, listening for the bell, putting things in his bag, sitting on the mat for instructions and working with others to complete tasks. We were so proud of him! After observing his progress in SIP and a heartfelt chat with Lauren Moore (Abacus Director), the search for a mainstream school began!

It was a big leap of faith as we were originally concerned with how Caleb would cope. However,

we can safely say now that we made the right decision. Caleb is thriving in a mainstream Prep class at a wonderful local school. He has made some terrific friends and has a brilliant teacher and aide who challenge him in his learning and integrate him into all activities with his peers.

Abacus have been a wonderful support in the school transition process. Caleb continued to attend the SIP program once a week in term one where his school skills were honed and built upon.

At the end of term one, after 2 1/2 years, Caleb finished his time at Abacus.

It was a bittersweet goodbye, as we are excited to move into new things but have developed some incredible relationships with many staff. Caleb celebrated with his SIP buddies, with whom I know he will have a special bond for life.

We are so very thankful to Abacus for believing in Caleb and convincing us of his abilities too. They have shown us how he learns best and enabled us to understand our son in a way we never could before. We now have the confidence to be strong advocates for our gorgeous boy to show others that he is not to be underestimated! Caleb is well on his way to living a full and productive life and will most definitely contribute amazing things to his community.

The Blashki Family



Cohen

Cohen's story is a little different to most, we had to push for his autism assessment to be done.

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He was 4 1/2 years old with minimal language, lack of social & general communication skills, he also failed to request simple items or activities.

Most of my concerns were met with 'his behaviours are just blindisms'. As Cohen has been blind since birth and it is common for children to fall behind.

When he was diagnosed as being on the spectrum with a potential to having a mild intellectual disability- we were gutted. Although that then meant that we could now grieve what I think we always knew and move forward with decisions for his schooling.

I believed Cohen understood what I was saying, he just didn't respond, even when prompted. It felt like he had no interest in learning new things at all. I was completely exhausted with it, and the endless interventions (too many to list) that he was doing, not only was I doing a lot of the work, I was paying largely for the privilege.

Then, one of the other parents from an early intervention program our children attended

together, was telling me how her son was going to a program for children with autism spectrum disorders called Abacus. I learned her son did not say more than two words, even to family, and he wouldn't hold a pen in his hand. She was so proud of how, within six months of Abacus intervention, he was talking in sentences, and could write his own name. WOW the power of that conversation.

I arranged a meeting with Emma Miller to introduce Cohen to the facility and create his programs, my mind was at rest. "OMG, they get him, they absolutely get him" I said to my husband Adam.

Cohen responds best to tasks that are broken down into small fun sequences that allow him to grasp concepts. (His programming is set up this way) He can then take that new ability and use it to acquire other developmental milestones for his future independence. We could not thank Abacus enough for in such a small amount of time providing Cohen with the tools to achieve what years of other early interventions could not.

Bree



Flynn

Where do you begin!

The joy of having a new born son and your dreams for his future. Then, the experience of the stages of grief when you are told your son is on the Autism Spectrum. POW!!!!

We will always remember the moment we were told. Flynn was two years old when he was diagnosed and we were told that it was up to us what kind of life he would have. We were told there was very little funding to help, therapy costs were over \$50,000 a year and we needed early intervention to give him the best chance in life.

So after a few weeks of absorbing the news, we got moving. We spent hours on the internet studying the 'Best Practice' guidelines for intervention treatments and decided that ABA therapy with Speech and Occupational Therapy were our best options.

On the Peninsula at that time there were no ABA centres open or places to go so we advertised for people to help us. We struck gold because Lauren Moore answered our prayers and came to work with Flynn.

Flynn had approximately 30-35 hours of ABA therapy a week at home from the age of two and a half. Before ABA therapy, Flynn had significant gross and fine motor delays, as well as speech and auditory processing delays.

The early years were spent on visual schedules for everything. We continue to use these for holidays planned, camps and any unexpected activity which may cause Flynn anxiety.

Flynn continued his therapy and at five years of age he attended two years of Pre-School with

tremendous support from his ABA therapists.

In 2007-2008 the vision for an ABA centre was born and through the leadership of Lauren and Michael Moore and a small group of supporters, Abacus Learning Centre opened. It is with great pride that we say Flynn was one of the first students. Now at high school, Flynn is achieving consistent success.

Whilst Flynn will always have his challenges, the skills he has been provided with have given him confidence to face his anxieties and fears

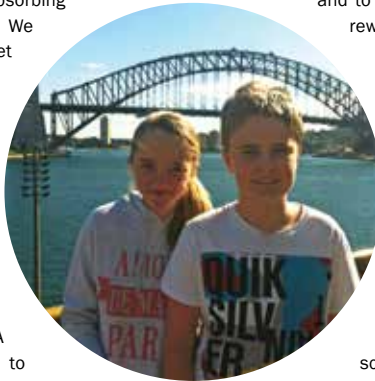
- to try and push his comfort boundaries and to give him a meaningful and rewarding life.

As a result, Flynn has travelled easily overseas and to many parts of Australia and is the best traveller in our family. Flynn attends a fantastic school which totally supports him and most importantly encourages him to maximise his potential.

Flynn is surrounded by school friends, family friends and friends in the community who love and encourage him and accept him for the unique individual he is. One of Flynn's greatest supporters is his personal trainer who has opened up so many doors for Flynn through the creation of his love of exercising.

The diagnosis of autism is the beginning of a journey for the whole family. Like all journeys there are peaks and troughs. However it is a road you take together. We have taken this journey with the Abacus team and it has given us our beautiful son Flynn, who we would not change at all - for all the world.

The Davies Family



Kale

Autism, what's it all about?

I expect most people's only experience of the condition is of savant children drawing near perfect renditions of cathedrals from memory or Rain Man, neither of which are of much help when you have been stunned with that diagnosis; and stunned is exactly how we left the office almost two years ago

Kale is our son, and two years ago, like any parent in that position, we wondered, what his future would be? Will he ever be able to fit in? Can he learn? How will he ever be able to form relationships or communicate with others? The most basic social skills seem so difficult for him and the few quiet, mumbled sounds he makes are unintelligible. Will he go to a mainstream school? Does he understand? Its then, that you realise what a mountain he has to climb, and you also. Books, therapies, searching the internet looking for answers, developmental schools and early intervention, have all played a part in unlocking his potential, but none has gone further than ABA at Abacus.

My painfully shy little boy that started over twelve months ago and found it hard to hold his parents and older brothers' eyes with his own, let alone a stranger's, is now navigating the difficult waters of social interaction, with a few bumps, but with a confidence that surprises us daily. Kale, our boy that would break down and

hide himself in frustration because he couldn't find the words, will now not only tell you what he wants, but tell you how he wants it. Kale continually shows us how much potential there is to be unlocked.

Abacus taught Kale many things - how to communicate and express himself using words, how to learn, play and make friends, and enjoy this learning.

Kale now attends a great mainstream school with his brother, Eligh, as a prep student. I remember Eligh repeating many times over a few years, how he couldn't wait for his little brother to join him at school. You can imagine how excited we all were knowing that this was not a dream we hoped to come true, but a reality. Kale's hard work, and the professional, dedicated and caring team at Abacus made this happen.

Kale is a typical prep student who enjoys playing with other children, making new friends, learning, getting involved and joining in. He enjoys school; so for us, what more can you ask for? We are as proud as punch!

Thank you Abacus for giving us hope for Kale's future. We continue to spread the word about Abacus and giving ABA a try, as we have seen the incredible results. Once again Thank-you.

The Rennalls Family



Lachlan

Lachie is a charming cheeky 3-year old boy.

He's very happy always smiling loves to have fun, his smart and is typically well behaved for his age. He was an easy baby, slept and ate well, loved affection and reached all the typical milestones rolling, baby talk, crawling, walking... our first baby, our everything. He is perfect.

We struggled when some family and child care raised concerns about Lachie's development and I told myself and everyone else "He'll do it in his own time". It was hard to hear that people thought there was something wrong with Lachie. We wanted the best for our son and were really worried about him having the label of autism something he would live with for the rest of his life.

Now we are not so concerned about this label. He is still perfect and I wouldn't change him for the world. Yes, Lachie thinks differently but I love that about him. We have our challenges but doesn't every parent! He is smart and we know he will do great things. We still worry and are uncertain about things but we have the best support team in Abacus and we cannot thank them enough for the difference they have made to us as a family and most importantly in Lachie's life.

We didn't know anything about autism or ABA therapy and were very fortunate that my sister Leah knew Lauren the Executive Director at Abacus and suggested we make an appointment. At the initial meeting that Lachie

attended he was comfortable and connected straight away with his soon to be Case Manager Jody. Lachie was enrolled and started the following week. From day one Lachie has loved being at Abacus. He has an active mind and was ready to learn but in a way that I didn't know how to teach him. I had tried in the typical ways but he was difficult to connect with. I watch in awe at all the words and things he knows taught to him by his therapists.

Every new program, Lachie starts he is blitzing and it shows in his everyday life. It wasn't long after Lachie had started a day I'll never forget waiting for him at the end of the day and he came running towards me yelling Mummy! Mummy! He had never said my name and he was 3 years old. I had to wipe the tears from my eyes and nothing could take the smile off my face! What a moment and I had these amazing people to thank. He is learning life skills and will be attending a mainstream pre-school next year. Without Abacus and ABA therapy we are not sure if this would be the case.

Words cannot describe how grateful we are for everyone at Abacus's effortless work. We are so lucky to have found a team of people who cares so very deeply for these kids and getting them the best possible outcome.

Forever grateful,
Kirsty, Pete & Camryn



Levi

Levi was born a healthy and very happy baby.

Levi was very late with achieving some milestones, he didn't sit up unassisted until he was 11 months old, didn't crawl until he was 13 months old and didn't walk until 15 months of age. We were referred to a Pediatrician when he was 12 months old due to his slow development. Levi had no speech (not even babbling), very limited eye contact, and wouldn't respond to his name being called. He would only play with toys with wheels and look at them from different angles out of the corners of his eyes or play for hours on end lining up his blocks.

We had also noticed that he was not responding to loud sounds.

We would stand behind him and clap our hands with no reaction, we immediately thought he may have a hearing problem. After consulting with our Pediatrician we were sent off for a hearing test, vision test and told to start speech therapy. All tests came back normal, perfect hearing and vision. Levi was diagnosed with Global

Development Delay at the age of 15 months. After doing a lot of research and speaking to family and close friends, we soon realised the problem may have been a lot deeper than anything we had thought...Autism.

Levi was diagnosed with Autism at 2 years, 3 months. He started at Abacus aged 2 years, 4 months.

From the day of Levi's diagnosis his life changed dramatically. Levi now attends Abacus two full days a week and the results we have seen over the past two and a half years of ABA therapy have been amazing. Levi now responds to his

name being called, responds to people entering a room, is very social with people, interacts and plays with his older sister and plays with a variety of toys. Levi is very mischievous and cheeky, climbing on everything and becoming a little boy! He recently started horse riding, which he loves and looks forward to each week. The other loves in Levi's life are swimming, the trampoline and swings, the iPad and of course cuddles with his family. Levi is still non-verbal but there is a lot of babbling, heaps of letter sounds and different noises being made, with

new ones every day. Levi even has a few words! Levi started mainstream

Kindergarten this year which is an amazing achievement as we never thought this may have been possible for him. Levi is doing really well and is fitting into the kindergarten setting nicely, the teachers and children love him.

Levi's biggest fan is his older sister and best friend, Leni. She adores Levi, always wanting to help him and even runs her own

ABA sessions with Levi at home.

The love that the two of them share is beautiful, no one understands Levi as well as his big sister.

Levi would not be where he is today without the amazing team at Abacus. The work they have done and continue to do for my son and our family is unbelievable and I can't thank them enough. We couldn't be happier with Levi's progress over the last 2½ years & we can't wait to see where he will be in another 12 months. We are extremely proud of our little man.

Hayley Lovell, mum to Levi



Luke

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In January 2014, we started to worry about our little boy Luke who was 18 months old. He didn't look us in the eye or respond to his name. He cried constantly, preferred playing by himself, and he often seemed lost in his own little world.

While we suspected something was wrong, being told that Luke had "Autism" was devastating. It felt like a door being slammed shut on our little boy's future. We received Luke's official diagnosis in June 2014 just prior to his second birthday.

As parents we felt so lost. We didn't know what to expect, what we could do, or to whom we could turn.

Discovering Abacus Learning Centre and Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) therapy was like a lifeline, not only for Luke, but our whole family.

The team at Abacus developed a tailored early intervention program for Luke. He started working with his amazing team of therapists and step by step, week by week, he began to reconnect with us and the world around him.

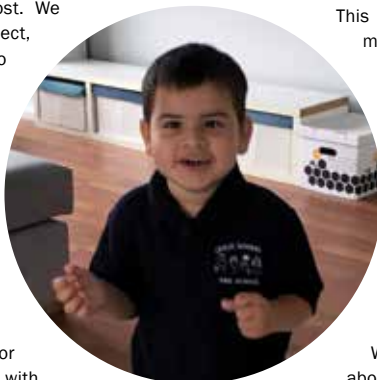
As well as working with Luke, the team at Abacus equipped us with both the theory behind ABA and practical strategies to help us generalise Luke's new skills to the home and wider community.

Over the two years since his diagnosis Luke has made amazing progress and is now a completely different little boy. His cheeky smile and giggles light up the room, and he loves interacting with

people.

After having a severe speech delay he is now a real chatterbox with a great sense of humour. Luke loves everything to do with letters and numbers and is now counting and starting to read his favourite books out loud.

He has the communication skills to be able to help us understand when he is frustrated. He no longer screams all the time, which has made our home life so much more relaxed and for the first time, a lot of fun.



This year Luke commenced mainstream three year old kinder and we couldn't be more pleased with how well he has transitioned with the support of his Abacus team. He actively participates in story time and other group mat time sessions and is even asking children their names on the playground.

We are now very optimistic about Luke's future. With a lot more hard work, we are hopeful that he will be able to attend a mainstream school and catch up with his peers.

It seems almost cliché to say that Abacus has "changed our life", but that's what they do. They literally change the lives of the children they work with, and we are so grateful to have found Lauren and her team when we did.

Anthony and Bec Fernando

Madison & Thomas

My daughter Madison was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder at age three.

We were advised that she would need up to 30-40 hours a week therapy to help her. When she started she said no words, had no attention span, no learning ability, limited eye contact, was basically uncomfortable in her own skin and lived in her own world. Everything was a struggle, even a simple task of getting her dressed, keeping clothes on, brushing her hair, getting her into a car, off a swing, going shopping, everything was hard.

In this time, with ABA therapy at Abacus, she has made amazing progress. From sitting down to complete tasks, learning letters, numbers, colours, shapes, names, emotions, animals, objects etc. She is now putting three word sentences together, attending a mainstream kinder two and a half days and Abacus two and a half days, started dance classes and swimming lessons. Just very recently

has started listening and following instructions which is making life so much easier.

It is still an ongoing process but each small step is a major milestone for us! Along the way, with regular meetings, Abacus have also helped us with parenting on how to deal with situations and scenarios and breaking down teaching techniques to help us at home and out and about.

My two and a half year old son Thomas has also just started attending Abacus. He says no words and is currently in the process of being diagnosed.

We are not sure where we would be without the help of Abacus, this allows us to hold more hope for our children's future knowing that Abacus is there to help guide and support our family.

Monique (Madison and Thomas Mum)



Marcus

Marcus was an unusually placid baby, always content, but whenever concern was raised people used to say how lucky we were.

Marcus reached all his milestones, although walking was a bit slow at 16 months but nothing to be concerned about according to the health professionals. Language development was very slow, he had about five words around 18 months including mama, dada and Bobo (our dog). As Marcus was raised bilingual initially (Mum is Dutch) we assumed he was slower as is often the case with kids learning two languages. At around 20 months however, Marcus started to develop unusual fears and seemed to withdraw, words disappeared. He became quite repetitive and obsessed with rituals like opening and shutting things, playing with his belts in pram and highchairs and pressing buttons on toys over and over. He also started to tippy toe.

On his visit to the maternal health nurse at two and half years old, we had to point out his gait and raised our concerns about possible autism. We were referred to a GP specialising in the field. After a lengthy waiting period, Marcus was diagnosed with Autistic Disorder and global delay at three and a half years old. Even though it was our expected diagnosis, the news hits you hard and the grief that follows is difficult to cope with. Even before diagnosis, as a parent, you start to search for a cure or 'recovery' as they call it. We had started private speech therapy at two and a half years old as well as a Gluten/Casein free diet at three. We saw osteopaths, homeopaths, speech pathologists, occupational therapists, etc. Having a background in Psychology, it was of surprise that ABA was not the main approach used for children on the spectrum in Australia



(in fact many professionals advised us against us and told us it only works for some children).

I had searched ABA Centres and came across 'Abacus'. Located in Hastings (far from Torquay) and discussed it with Dad, but we decided to wait for the common service provider to take over services through ECIS in June that year. Unfortunately with no increase in therapy hours and constant changes in therapists, we felt the need to go to Hastings to have a chat with Lauren

Moore and Emma Miller. We walked out

of Abacus with the words "Marcus will be easy to teach" echoing

in our heads. And to our question if he would ever

speak they told us that he would most likely

pick up language, where other therapists

could not give us an answer. This was a

turning point for us but the distance was still an

issue. After considering options closer by (most of

them unaffordable) we had a couple of weeks trial at a new

Melbourne Centre but it was nothing like Abacus and we quickly enrolled Marcus at

Abacus and never looked back!

Marcus has gained a tremendous set of skills in the past six months. His receptive and

expressive language are developing amazingly. This, in combination with tolerance training

(hairdresser, doctor, food intake, water drinking etc) has given Marcus the tools to make everyday

life 'possible'. Most importantly Marcus loves going to Abacus, loves learning and has loads

of fun! Enrolling him at Abacus has changed our world, given us courage and new hope. Every

child with autism benefits from ABA (even our two year old typical developing child does!)

Abacus indeed is the house of miracles.

Molly

Can I tell you a little about the life and times of my beautiful granddaughter - The Irrepressible Unsinkable, Molly Dart.

When Molly was three years old we noticed that she didn't say very much. She had missed a few of the early milestones – no “mum, mum, mum” or “dad, dad, dad” for Molly. Although when confronted by something which needed redressing, she was more than able to make herself understood by using lots of other means - other than language. She also had an older brother who did enough talking for both of them Molly attended her local Pre-School and had a great time enjoying the social interaction with the other children. Her teachers mentioned to my son and daughter-in-law that perhaps there were some aspects of her development which required 'looking into' – particularly her speech (or lack of it).

They suggested investigating the possibility that Molly may have Autism, and she commenced sessions with a private Speech Pathologist. A gradual improvement was achieved but a local Pediatrician and then a Physician confirmed that Molly was on the Autism Spectrum. Molly's parents, Steve and Marnie carried out some detective work of their own and soon became aware of the outstanding results coming from Abacus. Molly's teachers and therapists spoke highly about the early intervention programs available at Abacus which were specifically designed to enable children with ASD to achieve their fullest potential.

What a great day it was when Molly joined the Abacus community and what outstanding and inspiring results she has achieved.

Grandma's 'fridge door gallery' radiates with Molly's most beautiful drawings and wonderful

photographs of magic Abacus moments which include a smiling Molly proudly displaying her Shining Star Award for 'Fantastic Listening'. Pride of place however goes to the photograph of a beaming, confident little girl (with a missing front tooth) wearing a Black Graduation Cap, who can't hide her delight at receiving her impressive Certificate of Graduation, awarded in December 2015 for Graduating from Abacus School Integration Program.

These days her social skills are exceptional; her language skills are amazing; her behaviour has improved dramatically; her vocabulary is extensive and she can express herself brilliantly. Sometimes she needs to censure me because I have not listened carefully to something she is telling me. I love it when she looks me straight in the eye and says confidently, quite clearly and very positively ...“silly Grandma, that's not what I said!” And she is quite right - I need to brush up on my listening skills!

Molly has commenced her Foundation Year and, in second term will be part of the Abacus In-School ABA Program. We are all confident that she will benefit from the program's exciting mix of proactive (ground work for topics which she will encounter in the classroom) and reactive (areas which will occur in her own individual learning program) support and encouragement.

We can't wait to see Molly's life unfold. She has worked hard under the brilliant guidance from Abacus, and deserves the wonderful future that awaits her.

Adoring Grandma, Liz Dart

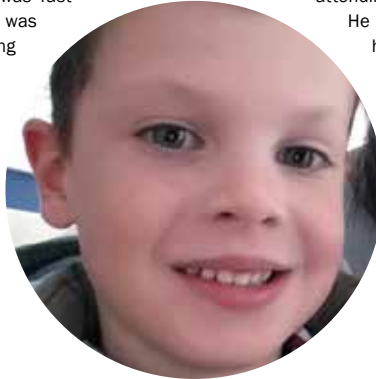


Olly

Olly was born a happy and healthy little boy and seemed to reach most of his milestones.

At his twelve month maternal health check we were asked about his speech and whether he was expressing any words. He was not. At 18 months we sought independent advice from a speech pathologist and from the age of two, Olly was having weekly speech therapy appointments. The specialists diagnosed Olly with dyspraxia.

We had asked the question early on if our son was autistic but our GP, speech pathologist and pediatrician assured us that he was not. Four-year-old kinder was fast approaching and our son was still nonverbal and babbling was his only form of communication. Despite this we decided to enrol Olly into a mainstream Kinder and at the same time have him assessed for Autism Spectrum Disorder. We received the results. Olly had an intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorder.



Olly's Psychologist recommended intensive occupational therapy and speech pathology or attending Abacus Learning Centre. After meeting with Emma and Nina at Abacus Learning Centre, Adam and I knew instantly that this was going to be the right fit for Olly. He started with Abacus back in 2014 and spent 15 months working extremely hard. We could not be more thankful for the consistent support we have received from the staff at Abacus.

Fast forward almost two years and Olly is attending Somers Primary School.

He is able to read and, while he still has a delay in his speech, he is able to communicate and has many simple and clear words within his vocabulary. We can confidently say that Abacus helped our son find his voice.

Oscar

After meeting all key milestones until the age of two, Oscar was diagnosed with autism at the age of 32 months.

At the time of diagnosis it was like he had slipped into a black hole. He was completely non-verbal, had no eye contact, and wouldn't even register you walking into a room. He would only play with toys with wheels and he would look at them from different angles out of the corners of his eyes and line them up, he had no imaginative play and no mimicking adults, absolutely no interest in other kids and most adults, he stimmed, and he tantrumed. His tantrums were like a wild animal trying to escape from ropes, he would scream and scratch me and throw himself heavily at the ground.

At home he was mostly happy and entertained himself and when you tried to play with him he would ignore you. But if we took him out of the house it mostly resulted in tantrums, tears and lots of running away. It was far from fun and we really started to question why we even bothered to try to have family outings. It got to the point where neither set of grandparents or my husband would take him to the park as he was such a danger to himself and it was too risky.

Six weeks to the day after diagnosis, he started at Abacus and attended for two and a

half years. The transformation in Oscar in that time is nothing short of a miracle. Oscar's early intervention has led to him starting in Prep this year, at five years of age in a main stream school where he is mostly indistinguishable from his peers. Something we never dreamed of happening! He talks in full sentences and is quite the chatterbox, plays beautifully with other children and has formed some lovely friendships at school and has play dates and attends birthday parties. He shows great care and empathy and has amazing

imaginative play. He is learning to read and is always writing, drawing and creating things out of boxes using scissors and endless rolls of sticky tape! We now enjoy family outings and he is an absolute pleasure to be with.

I'm so proud of Oscar and all he has achieved and I look forward to his future now with hope instead of fear, and for that I will be eternally grateful to Abacus.

I know of the precious gift that Abacus gives families, it gives them their child back and it gives them a family life and gives these children the opportunity to be the best they can".

Danielle Grant



Paddy

We made the decision to seek intensive therapy after Paddy's first day of three year old kinder.

It was very unsuccessful and Ronnie felt like we needed more help for Paddy. We live in North-East Victoria and the early intervention services around here are few.

Ronnie spent the next day online looking for ABA therapists and trying to work out how we could get one of them to work in our home with Paddy. She had done ABA training herself but it was impossible for her to give the time needed with our other newborn son in the house as well.

She found a place called Abacus in Hastings and after looking it up on Google we decided to make an appointment.

After meeting with the staff it was no longer a case of whether we were going to but how we were going to enrol Paddy. We loved the sound of how the therapy was set up, no longer was it a recount that we were reading on a forum but it was something we could watch and ask about.

All of our questions were answered and our fears about the therapy allayed.

I remember driving around Hastings after the meeting and our four and a half hour drive home trying to work out how we were going to get this done. We just had to and we were enrolled in Abacus and moved in three weeks.

We immediately saw results after enrolment and were so impressed. We were always made to feel welcome when dropping Paddy off and we were invited to walk in and watch lessons at any time.

December came and the time that we had allocated for Abacus had come to an end. It was time for Paddy to enrol in kinder. We enrolled in another centre that meant Paddy could attend

kinder while doing therapy and work on his social skills and integration into mainstream education.

Unfortunately (maybe fortunately in hindsight) a couple of days after enrolling we received a phone call saying that the centre was changing its structure and Paddy would no longer be able to attend. So we called Abacus straight away and explained the scenario, their response, "Of course we'd love to have Paddy back next year!"

We quickly worked out a way for therapists to shadow Paddy at kinder and the next twelve months were just as good as Paddy's first year. The thing that really stood out to us was the way that they celebrated in Paddy's successes, as much as we did. We would go to a meeting with a goal in mind and they would say, "Yes, leave it to us."

After twelve more months of therapy, kinder and long trips home every weekend it was finally time to say goodbye to Abacus. We really didn't know how we were going to say goodbye to these people who had become like family to us. It would have been a lot easier if we could just take them all with us.

A lot of tears were shed on Paddy's last morning and the final drive home was extremely hard. We will never forget what everyone at Abacus did for our family and our boy Paddy. Words will never be enough to thank these people for (I don't want to say job they do because it is so much more than a job to us) everything they have done!

Kane, Ronnie, Paddy and Elliott Mayhew



Sidney

On July 15, 2010 Justin and Michelle welcomed into the world their beautiful little boy - Sidney.

Just like every other father, Justin was ecstatic that he had produced his heir, his pride and joy, his little boy whom he would take to the footy, watch him race go-carts and hopefully one day, work side by side together in the family building business.

When Sidney was about two years of age Michelle compiled all the home movies onto DVD and noticed the difference between Sidney and his older sister Molly at the same age. Never comparing siblings, Michelle watched overtime that Sidney's speech was not progressing, his interaction with children on social occasions was limited and his aggression was spiraling out of control.

Finally after many Pediatric visits we were referred to a child psychologist who confirmed that yes, Sidney was on the Autism spectrum. With this diagnosis our world came crumbling down - just the word 'Autistic' in which our gorgeous little boy would now be labeled as, was devastating. The hopes and aspirations that you have for your child become blurred and Sidney's future became unclear. But within days, Michelle had researched and made contact with a renowned ABA Therapy (Applied Behavior Analysis) Centre in Hastings. This remarkable Centre is Abacus Learning Centre, Achieving with Autism.

Every child on the Autism spectrum is

completely different. In Sidney's case he has a severe communication delay and is particularly sensitive to noise. So on a daily basis, life can become very confronting for Sidney. For instance: on Christmas Day when all the family were around to celebrate and share in the joy of watching the children open their Christmas presents, this was just too much for Sidney's little mind to tolerate. He hid under the dining room table crying and holding his ears wanting all the noise to go away. We ended up putting all his presents away in the cupboard so he could not see them, only to bring them out months later when he could cope.



Sidney has now been at Abacus for about six months and in that short amount of time we have seen such a dramatic change in Sidney's speech, attention, concentration and overall demeanor. Sidney now plays with children his own age as he has the ability to communicate.

Sidney's future is no longer uncertain. Sidney will go to a mainstream Kindergarten next year and will attend Molly's school. Sidney may not be able to go to the footy with his dad, but they will go car racing and work side-by-side, because they already are!

Every day in the most minute of ways, Abacus is changing not just Sidney's life, but also ours as a family.

Vincent

Vincent was one of the easiest babies you could ask for, in fact it was a dream pregnancy and what I would call an easy and effortless birth.

He hit milestones and an extremely quick rate (what did I know? He was my first child). He walked at 8 months old was talking at 11 months, saying full sentences by his 1st birthday, and even using the toilet at 14 months old. Two months before his little brother Phillip was born, I saw my child take a turn ...for the worse. He completely stopped talking, going to the toilet and his anxiety and self-harming ways reached a point I didn't know what to do. At the time we thought it was the stress from the baby so we 'waited it out' but it just got worse. I saw fear in his eyes every day and when he would punch himself in the face we felt helpless. I couldn't make it stop. He was our child but I felt we couldn't help him. Deep down inside I knew already what it was before seeking help, Vincent has Autism. We took the long road to a diagnosis and the diagnosis finally came it hit me hard! Even though I



already knew, I didn't know it was this bad. Our world was crushed as the words were said he may never talk, never go to mainstream school and never live independently. My sadness turned to anger and that's when I jumped in to action. I searched and read everything I could to find what would help him. That's when, ABACUS (ABA therapy) came in to our lives. I can't thank them enough for them giving me back the boy I once knew. The sociable, funny, affectionate boy I thought I had lost forever. Therapy has helped him cope and to allow people to see the boy he really is. He may never be able to live independently but I know now there is a chance and that's good enough for me. Vincent, I love you. You are such a kind boy and a loving big brother. I can't wait to see the young man you will become.

Melisa Trajkovski

Abacus Learning Centre is a registered charity, which provides ABA therapy programs for children with ASD. Abacus subsidises the cost of our services to families from fundraising and donations. All income from our services and all donations or monies from fundraising are used to provide our service.

What is ASD?

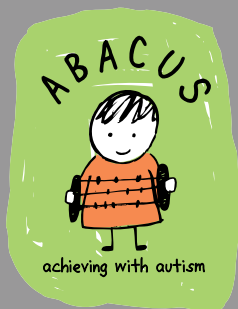
Autism Spectrum Disorder represents a broad group of developmental disorders characterised by impaired social interactions, problems with verbal and non-verbal communication, and repetitive behaviours, or severely limited activities and interests. The severity of symptoms vary widely which result in relatively mild challenges for someone on the high functioning end of the spectrum. For others, symptoms may be more severe, as when repetitive behaviours and lack of spoken language interfere with everyday life. Although there is no known cure for autism, many children with this diagnosis can experience good outcomes with intervention.

What is ABA?

Applied Behaviour Analysis is a systematic method of addressing and altering behaviour by focussing on the principles that explain how learning takes place. Through decades of research, the field of behaviour analysis has developed many techniques for increasing useful behaviours and reducing those that may cause harm or interfere with learning. This generally involves breaking down complex skills or behaviours into smaller steps and teaching them through the use of clear instructions, rewards, repetition and reinforcement in order to increase desired behaviours. ABA is the use of these techniques and principles to bring about meaningful and positive change in behaviour.

ABA at Abacus

Abacus provides intensive early intervention in the form of one-on-one 3 hour therapy sessions with the therapist and the student, as well as some supported group instruction, for 12-30 hours per week, generally over a period of 1-3 years. We are dedicated to delivering strategies that will make a difference and believe that all our students, regardless of their unique challenges, will make positive gains. Abacus also provides in-school ABA programs in conjunction with schools on the Mornington Peninsula and Frankston.



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