



St Anthony's Family Care Paediatric Speech Pathologist, Kim Kliman and Discover and Learn student Raymond Ngo during a speech therapy session which forms part of St Anthony's comprehensive program for children diagnosed with Autism.

Difficult first words for Raymond

At an early age, Raymond Ngo's parents were concerned about his speech development when they saw he was not progressing as his two older siblings had.

When Raymond was not showing signs of speaking at age one and a half, Mr and Mrs Ngo realised they needed to take action.

Raymond's father, David Ngo, gave us some insight into Raymond's early challenges prior to joining St Anthony's Early Intervention Service for Children with Autism.

"At the age of one and a half we were concerned about Raymond's speech. He wasn't saying anything at all. He would point, cry and make sounds, but it did not seem like those sounds were going to form words. He

was clearly getting frustrated. By the age of two, we took him to our local childhood health centre nurse and she asked us to complete a questionnaire. At the end of it, Raymond scored a zero in communication and we were then referred to the local speech therapist," explained David Ngo.

Unfortunately, Mr and Mrs Ngo felt that the infrequency of the therapy sessions meant Raymond was not making significant progress. The Ngos were referred to paediatrician, Dr Julie Parle, who diagnosed Raymond with Autism.

"Julie referred us to St Anthony's and after being placed on the waiting list, we were fortunate enough to get a place last November," David said.

Dr Parle was keen to get the Ngo

family into a program with the aid of the Federal Government Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) Helping Children With Autism funding which gives families the opportunity to use the early childhood intervention services that St Anthony's offers.

David sees the improvement in Raymond and is keen to prepare him for school in 2013, though he is realistic about Raymond's progress to date: "I still see that there is some way to go. Certainly in cases of Autism, we can't expect to improve everything overnight.

We are still concerned about Raymond's speech, and we

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From the CEO

Dear friends,

Welcome to the winter edition of *Heart Matters*. This issue's feature story about Raymond Ngo, who started with St Anthony's last November really helps to reinforce that we are on the right track with the services we are providing to families.

Over the past few months, we've been busy working on our pilot music video project for refugee kids, and hosted our first 'father and son' camp for migrants. During the month of April, in the lead up to Easter our Early Learning Centre organised a live hatchery where all of the children learned about the life cycle, first hand. The event was extremely well received by children and parents.

I welcome your feedback on any of the articles in this issue, contact details are on the back page.

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believe he is speaking at about half of what is expected for his age, he is definitely speaking more and he has really made progress in other areas. Raymond enjoys a lot of social activities like singing and is playing more with his brothers and sister.

This is really good to see. I truly believe that it is the package that St Anthony's offers: the Discover and Learn program together with speech and occupational therapy that has contributed to his overall progress," he said.

While Raymond is the only child in the Ngo family who has been diagnosed with autism, with a fifth child due in July this year, the Ngos will have five kids under age seven, each with their own individual needs, a job to test even the most energetic parents.

David believes that even though having a large family is a challenge, there are great benefits in that the kids all support each other and provide physical and mental stimulation through play, and this is particularly good for Raymond's development. "Raymond really learns from his siblings, also when he is at the Discover and Learn program he learns a lot, especially through the social interaction. Kids with Autism can be shy but Raymond is the opposite, he's more bossy, if he likes a toy he will take it."

Of course, the Ngos have taken steps to teach sharing at home, where each child has a timed turn with a popular toy and when the time is up, it's the next child's turn.

David believes that with great progress comes sacrifice, so he intends to take six months off

to spend with his family in time for the birth of their fifth child.

What is Autism?

Autism is a neurologically based life-long developmental disorder. Individuals are diagnosed when they present with difficulties in communication, social interactions and repetitive or restricted behaviours.

St Anthony's Early Intervention Services Manager, Myrna Dominguez says that a multidisciplinary assessment is important to find out where the child is in terms of developmental milestones before starting early intervention.

Recognising that children with autism and their families present with different needs, goals and priorities are very important in St Anthony's early intervention service for achieving optimal developmental outcomes.

Learning about life in time for Easter

All the children at St Anthony's Early Learning Centre had something to chirp about when ten chicks hatched right before their eyes. It's part of a new direction the Centre is taking according to St Anthony's Early Learning Centre Manager, Teresa Petrone, "the life cycle can be difficult for children to comprehend so using visual perception and extension activities like drawing what they see helps to create a better understanding for them." The incubator stayed in the Centre for ten days and each group was given specific tasks to learn about the life cycle.



St Anthony's Discover and Learn Educator, Jackie Wilks and student Jeremiah enjoying some time with one of the hatchlings.



Left to right, one of St Anthony's Vacation Care volunteers and a Vacation Care participant enjoy swimming and other activities at the beach.

Learning life skills while having fun

The focus of many of St Anthony's Vacation Care programs is to combine fun activities with valuable life experiences according to St Anthony's Flexible Respite Coordinator, Anneke Woods.

"We work to provide a fun and exciting school holiday program for the children and the activities selected are combined with the learning of life skills that can be transferred to their daily lives.

During Vacation Care we try to do things that the kids wouldn't normally be able to do, as parents are too busy or the activity is too expensive or difficult to coordinate. We will go and see movies, but we steer towards involving activities that are more creative in skill-building for everyday life. For example we catch public transport and get the kids to use their own tickets, this way they are learning life skills, and that is something we want to focus more on in the future with Vacation Care, we teach them to do it safely and properly," Anneke explained.

Examples of last April's events included kayaking, bush walking through Cumberland State Forest, and a puppet show where the older group and the youngest group were combined.

"Combining the groups helped the younger kids to have some older role models. Often it is difficult to engage the younger kids, and they look to the older kids for guidance. As they start to get older their needs change, so they like to be given responsibilities, this is where the life skills also come into play," Anneke said.

The day starts and finishes at the Mary MacKillop Children's Respite House, which was opened last year in May. Depending on each child's age-ability they are placed into one of three groups and participate in a range of activities. The groups are named: Plutos, Jupiters and Neptunes.

St Anthony's Vacation Care Program is run every school holiday period and any of the 43 families in the respite service can access it.



A generous donation by the owners and managers of Mr Men branded products will go to families in need.

Neat stuff for kids in need

Chorion Toys, the owners and managers of Mr Men and Mr Men Little Miss licensed merchandise have generously donated clothing and toys which will be given to families in need says St Anthony's Service Support and Development Manager, Helen Cooper.

"St Anthony's is grateful for the donation of these excellent quality toys and clothes which will be distributed to disadvantaged families accessing St Anthony's Migrant Services and Family Support Services."

The donation included kids' jeans, t-shirts, pyjamas, toys and thermal mugs.

Songs in their hearts

They left the atrocities of their homelands for Australian shores and have been expressing themselves through song. It's part of a music video project recently piloted for young refugees by St Anthony's Family Care and facilitated by Youth Arts Worker Craig Taunton. Fourteen students of the Intensive English Centre (IEC) at Chester Hill have been busy recording songs as part of the project. These kids have come from countries such as Ethiopia, Burma, Thailand, Afghanistan and Guinea, and many have been here less than six months.

"By using the medium of music and video, these kids are able to adapt much quicker to their new country. Music is a common language from all over the world," explained Craig. The pilot ran for eight weeks and the music video will officially launch later in June.



Photo courtesy of George Petropoulos

A student from St Anthony's Music Therapy Pilot project for refugee kids, singing her heart out while recording the song: "We are all from the IEC" which was performed live for fellow students on 6 May and will officially launch later in June.

Your support helps us change lives

Thank you for your continued support. St Anthony's is committed to improving the lives of children and families in need and your contribution enables us to carry on our good work.

S. M. Gormel Whybrow



St Anthony's Appeals Officer, Sister Carmel Whybrow

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