

Mum stoked with help for autism

Lindsey Jackson | 1st April 2011

MAX Mcleod is just like any other three-year-old boy – full of joy, intelligent, a smile from ear to ear and he loves playing with his toys.

The fact he has autism might not register at first glance, but it does make a difference to his life.

Autism is a lifelong disorder that affects one in 160 Australian children and this month is national Autism Awareness Month, with tomorrow also being World Autism Day.

There is no cure for the disorder, but with early intervention programs, the chances of a child learning new skills and adapting to their environment are significantly improved.

Max's mum Jacqueline said his main barriers were communication and social skills, but since Max had joined the AEIOU Foundation program at the ABC Centre in Emerald, he was improving every day.



Jacqueline Mcleod is overjoyed with the services the AEIOU Foundation provides for her autistic son Max.

Photo: Lindsey Jackson

Jacqueline said Max was first diagnosed with autism at the start of last year when the family was living in Wollongong, after a speech pathologist suggested he might have more than just a speech delay.

"When Max was finally diagnosed it was a bit of a relief after a very hard year. I finally had a direction to go, learn about and find services to help him," she said.

But the waiting list for Max to see a specialist was long in Wollongong, so when the family moved to Tieri for work Jacqueline and her husband Dan were relieved to find a program available close to home.

Max visits the centre three days a week, a two-hour round trip in the car, where he is in a kindergarten class with other kids his age and with autism.

The program has helped him so much, Jacqueline said she was confident Max could start Prep in a mainstream school next year.

"Before he started at the AEIOU he didn't like being with other kids," Jacqueline said.

"Daycare was a terrifying place for Max. I would drop him off in hopes of some social interaction and every time I would get a call not long after to come pick him up because he was so distressed and had been crying in the corner since I left."

Jacqueline said things were much different now and that Max loved visiting "the ABC bear" where he gets so excited he nearly pushes her out door.

"Now when I come to pick him up instead of a crying overwhelmed child I am delighted with the sight of Max sitting with other children and playing bingo or dancing with a big smile on his face," Jacqueline said.

Jacqueline said she was excited there was a month dedicated to autism so more people could understand the disorder.

AEIOU Foundation regional program manager Laurie Sperry said if families were concerned their child showed signs of autism they should contact their doctor for a referral to see a paediatrician.

"Once families have a formal diagnosis, autism advisors can assist with advising local autism service providers," Dr Sperry said.

Dr Sperry said the AEIOU program offered a supportive environment to encourage children to be independent learners.

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acceptance of people with autism and the lifelong, daily struggles they faced.

"With increased community awareness comes empowerment to embrace autism and work to develop an inclusive community which supports their needs," she said.

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