



Working to improve speech

By Lisa Anderson

Speech pathologist Amanda Brisbane helps children develop their speech and language, which in turn improves literacy and social skills.

Graduating from the Lincoln Institute with a Bachelor of Applied Science in Speech Pathology in 1987, Amanda worked at Goulburn Valley Health for a number of years, eventually becoming chief speech pathologist.

After a move to the Department of Human Services where she worked with more complex and needy children who required teams of specialists, Amanda began in private practice with a partner Sonia Priestly, working from consulting rooms at 77 Numurkah Rd, Shepparton.

There is much more to the role than just speech, Amanda said.

“Speech pathologists work with communication disorders, language, fluency, or voice problems caused by pathology in the

vocal chords.”

Amanda said this could also include adults with an acquired communication problem such as after a stroke, and those with eating and swallowing problems because these actions involve the same musculature.

“Sometimes after a stroke, people’s gag and cough reflexes may be impaired and food and liquid can go down the wrong way. A speech pathologist can assess whether it is safe for people to swallow and help them manage food,” she said.

“Predominantly in our private clinic we see autistic children from pre-school through to about 14 years of age, many of whom have speech and language within the normal range but who might need help with their pragmatic language or their social conversational skills to connect and relate to other people.”

Amanda said some chil-

dren might need assistance with the next level of communication, like how to assert themselves, and how to state their needs without offending others.

“A large part of our workload would be helping them develop conversational skills such as taking turns, giving feedback, and showing people they are listening,” she said.

Amanda said most of her work now was on the social aspect of speech.

She uses a range of activities from board games to role-playing and watching DVDs to work on these skills.

Understanding how oral language and sound awareness can impact on reading and social skills, Amanda can assess children’s underlying skills and set up individual reading programs.

Sometimes it is hard to improve their skills, because their speech or fluency problems might be too severe, so Amanda tries to ensure children feel better about them-

selves when they leave.

“Occasionally we get a quick fix but treatment is usually long term,” she said.

Another big part of her work is diagnostic testing to determine whether a child has autism. A speech pathologist focuses on pragmatic language, while a psychologist and pediatrician would look at other aspects of their development in a team approach to assessment.

When visiting schools as a speech pathologist, Amanda felt she was on the periphery and realised she would have to get into the mainstream system to make more of a difference.

Towards that goal she completed a Post Graduate Diploma in Education in 2009 and would eventually like to teach at primary-school level.

Her sub-speciality is literacy, dealing with children who have reading difficulties or dyslexia.



Passionate: Speech pathologist Amanda Brisbane wants to make a difference in children's lives.