

ANNUAL REPORT

JANUARY - DECEMBER 2010

AUTISM SECONDARY CONSULTATION AND TRAINING STRATEGY (ACT-NOW)



MONASH University

School of Psychology and Psychiatry

OVERVIEW

This report provides a summary of 2010 of the Autism Consultation and Training Strategy - NOW (ACT – NOW), Monash University. The Autism Secondary Consultation and Training Strategy (ACT-NOW) is funded by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) and is delivered across Victoria.

STAGE ONE:

Initial funding for the strategy was for three years (July 2005 to June 2007). Stage one of the strategy provided training, secondary consultation and information to parents and service providers working with young children (0-6 years) with autism and their families. See Report, July 2007 for summary of Stage One.

STAGE TWO:

Non-recurrent funds were allocated to continue with the ACT-NOW strategy (June 2007 to December 2008). This was an opportunity to consolidate what had already been achieved and respond to further needs identified by each region. Stage two focused on providing support, supervision, mentoring and consultation for professionals.

STAGE THREE:

Non-recurrent funds were allocated to continue with the strategy (January 2009 to December 2009). During this stage the focus was on further developing and maintaining the website and providing secondary consultation and training for specialist staff (including; case study presentations, mentoring, journal clubs, small discussion groups and training accreditation).

STAGE FOUR:

In response to recommendations of the Autism State Plan the Victorian Government allocated a further 4 years funding (January 2010 - December 2013) for the ACT-NOW strategy. The focus during stage four of the project has moved towards information and secondary consultation about complex issues and the development of new teaching resources and training materials. A further recommendation from the Autism State Plan was that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) employ Regional Autism Coordination Team (ReACT) Co-ordinators.

AIMS

In line with the goals of the Early Childhood Intervention Services vision and key priorities statement (DEECD, 2003), the aim of the ACT – NOW strategy has been to build skills and capacity across each DEECD region in Victoria in the area of Early Childhood (0-6 years) to enable each network of regional service providers to:

- ✓ Identify Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs)
- ✓ Provide a more integrated range of evidence based early interventions for young children with autism and their families that complement and interface with other agencies and services
- ✓ Promote understanding of ASDs in the wider community and strategies for working effectively with these children and their families
- ✓ Improve linkages between service providers & strengthen partnerships between services and families

This was achieved by the development of Regional Autism Coordination Teams (ReACTs); networking with their community through a comprehensive program of broadly accessible education and professional skills training workshops and multimedia resources; justified by the acquisition of specialist assessment and intervention skills; and supported and facilitated by specialist consultation and feedback on the outcomes of their activities. The training and consultation provided by ACT-NOW is based on the principles of best practice in autism early intervention. The strategy also embraces the principles of best practice in early childhood intervention outlined in the ECIS Programme Framework document (Department of Human Services, 2005).

THE ACT-NOW TEAM

The ACT-NOW team is based at the Centre for Developmental Psychiatry and Psychology (CDPP) at Monash University which is internationally recognised for its research in the field of PDDs. The members of the team have experience and expertise in specialist service provision, community and professional education, service development, support and consultation and family advocacy.

Directors: Prof. Bruce Tonge & Dr. Avril Brereton
Project Manager: Ms Kerry Bull
Project Staff: Mr Paul Bower

REGIONAL AUTISM COORDINATION TEAMS (ReACTS)

Throughout stages one to three of the strategy, the ACT-NOW team established and developed Regional Autism Coordination Team (ReACT) in each DEECD region in Victoria. The membership of each ReACT was determined by regional need, with a core group of representatives in each team. They included parents and a wide range of professional representatives including: Pre-School Field Officers, Inclusion Support Facilitators, Specialist Children's Services, Early Childhood Intervention Services, Parent Support Workers, Maternal and Child Health Nurses, Paediatricians, GPs, Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services, Local Government, Family Support Services and Community Health. The Commonwealth Government 'Helping Children with Autism' funding brought many new practitioners to the field, particularly from the private sector. These private practitioners have been invited to attend ReACT meetings to encourage linkages within the region. Autism Advisors from Autism Victoria are also regular members of each ReACT. Membership of the ReACTs has relied on ongoing goodwill and commitment. During stages one and two of the strategy, the Project Manager coordinated and chaired the quarterly meetings in each of the nine regional areas. In stage three of the strategy, the ACT-NOW project manager progressively encouraged and enabled the ReACTs to chair and minute their own meetings whilst providing support and state-wide liaison by phone-linking into the meetings.

A recommendation from the Autism State Plan (2009) was that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development employ ReACT Co-ordinators. ReACT Co-ordinators were employed for stage four of the strategy through additional funds. These .2 Program and Service Advisor (PASA) positions are employed in each region of the state.



The new regional react co-ordinators attend a meeting at the Royal Society earlier this year

The role of the DEECD ReACT Coordinators includes:

- Providing organisational support for the quarterly ReACT meetings
- Developing membership of the ReACT
- Identifying training needs of service providers working with young children with an ASD and their families and facilitating the roll-out of the ACT-NOW training materials
- Identifying information and consultation needs that can be provided by ACT-NOW through newsletters, fact-sheets, publications, presentations and website links
- Leading the ongoing development of the ReACT Action Plan for the coordination and integration of services for children with an ASD and their families
- Facilitating quarterly Journal Club discussions
- Liaising with ReACT members and the broader community about the ReACT and ACT-NOW strategy
- Developing linkages between sectors in the region
- Liaising with Government Departments to consolidate a regional response (Disability, Health, Mental Health, Education and Early Childhood)
- Liaising with the ACT-NOW team (Monash University) and DEECD (Programs and Partnerships Division) regarding training, consultation and regional needs
- Attending quarterly state-wide ReACT network meetings
- Contributing to the quarterly ReACTIONS newsletter

ReACT COORDINATORS (DECEMBER 2010)

REGION	DEECD	EMAIL
North	Priscilla Parodi	parodi.priscilla.p@edumail.vic.gov.au,
South	Sharon Blackney	blackney.sharon.l@edumail.vic.gov.au
East	Anne Kettle	kettle.anne.t@edumail.vic.gov.au,
West	Sally Kibble	sally.kibble@dhs.vic.gov.au
Hume	Jenny Drysdale	drysdale.jennifer.m@edumail.vic.gov.au
Grampians	Marg Bolton	bolton.margaret.c@edumail.vic.gov.au
Loddon-Mallee	Angela Walsh-Edgar	walsh-edgar.angela.t@edumail.vic.gov.au
Gippsland	Naomi Licciardello	naomi.licciardello@dhs.vic.gov.au
Barwon S-W	Michelle Lowe	lowe.michelle.c@edumail.vic.gov.au

REGIONAL ACTION PLANS

Throughout stage one of the Project, each ReACT developed Regional Action Plans. These working documents aimed to address regional issues related to providing better outcomes for young children with ASDs and their families. During stage two and three, the ReACTs continued to develop the plans and implement strategies. The Action Plans have been used to assist the ReACTs to recognise and mobilise their regional strengths and resources and to facilitate links both regionally and across the state. In stage four of the project, the ReACT Coordinators have worked with their teams to further develop the Action Plans and integrate them with other regional plans including: DEECD Business Plans, Regional Strategic Plans for Early Childhood and Youth, Program and Partnerships Business Plans, Regional ASD Annual Implementation Plans.

Many regions have focussed on primary issues raised in the Autism State Plan such as the need to extend and link key services and support, especially during times of transition, and to strengthen the ASD expertise of the workforce.

More specifically, ReACT actions plans have included goals such as:

- providing learning programs in early childhood services and schools that are inclusive of students with ASDs
- enhancing the integration of early childhood and school based services
- providing high quality information and training to support professionals working in child care settings, kindergartens and schools
- supporting children with an ASD, parents and professionals at critical transition points
- building the skills and capacity of EC & ECI service providers
- providing better outcomes for young children with an ASD and their families
- supporting the Regional Autism Leadership Group
- providing consistent, accessible and evidence based information for parents and professionals in the early years
- providing appropriate support for families from cultural & linguistically diverse and indigenous communities

INFORMATION AND TRAINING

WEBSITE

www.med.monash.edu.au/spppm/research/devpsych/actnow

A successful and popular website has continued to respond to the information needs of the regions. It contains training calendars, newsletters, links to reputable autism information websites, journal club presentations and a wide range of fact sheets.

FACT SHEETS

Fifty fact sheets have been written and posted on the ACT-NOW website to provide accessible, evidence based information for parents and professionals. Fact sheets have primarily been written by Dr. Avril Brereton in response to requests from ReACT members or to complement ACT-NOW training.

The following fact sheets are available on the ACT-NOW website:

- Autism and Anxiety (Translations available)
- Autism and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity (Translations available)
- Autism and Fussy Eating: Dietary Issues
- Autism and Sleep
- Autism and Surfing the Internet
- Autism and Television
- Autism Early Intervention: Best Practice - Recent Research
- Autism Early Intervention: Best Practice
- Autism: Assessment and Diagnosis
- Autism: Choosing a Treatment
- Autism: Evaluating a Treatment

Brothers and Sisters: Sibling Issues

CHecklist for Autism in Toddlers (CHAT)

Choosing activities using visual supports

Community-Home links in preschool years - Book about Me

Core Features of Autism: Communication (Translations available)

Core Features of Autism: Play & Behaviour (Translations available)

Core Features of Autism: Social Skills (Translations available)

Developing Social Skills

Developmental Assessment: Why bother?

Early Features of Autism

Effective Referral to General Practitioners

Family-Centered Practices in Child Assessments

Gathering Information: Genograms

Genes and Autism

Glossary of Terms

Grandparents of Children with Autism

Helping young children to communicate using visual supports

Increasing joint attention skills in young children with autism

Managing Routines, Rituals & Repetitive Motor Mannerisms

Managing Special Interests

M-CHAT : Identify Autism in Toddlers

MMR and Autism

MMR Update

Overview of the Developmental Behaviour Checklist (DBC)

Parent Education and Skills Training

Pre-schoolers with autism: Work and Play

Psycho educational Profile - Third Edition (PEP-3)

Regression in Autism

The National Autism Centre's National Standards Report

Toilet Training

Using a Play Ideas Mat

Very Early Signs of Autism : Recent Research

Visual Supports: Timetables & Schedules

What is Asperger's Disorder?

What is Autism? (Translations available)

Working together with parents in the preschool years (Part 1)

Working together with parents in the preschool years (Part 2)

TRAINING MATERIALS

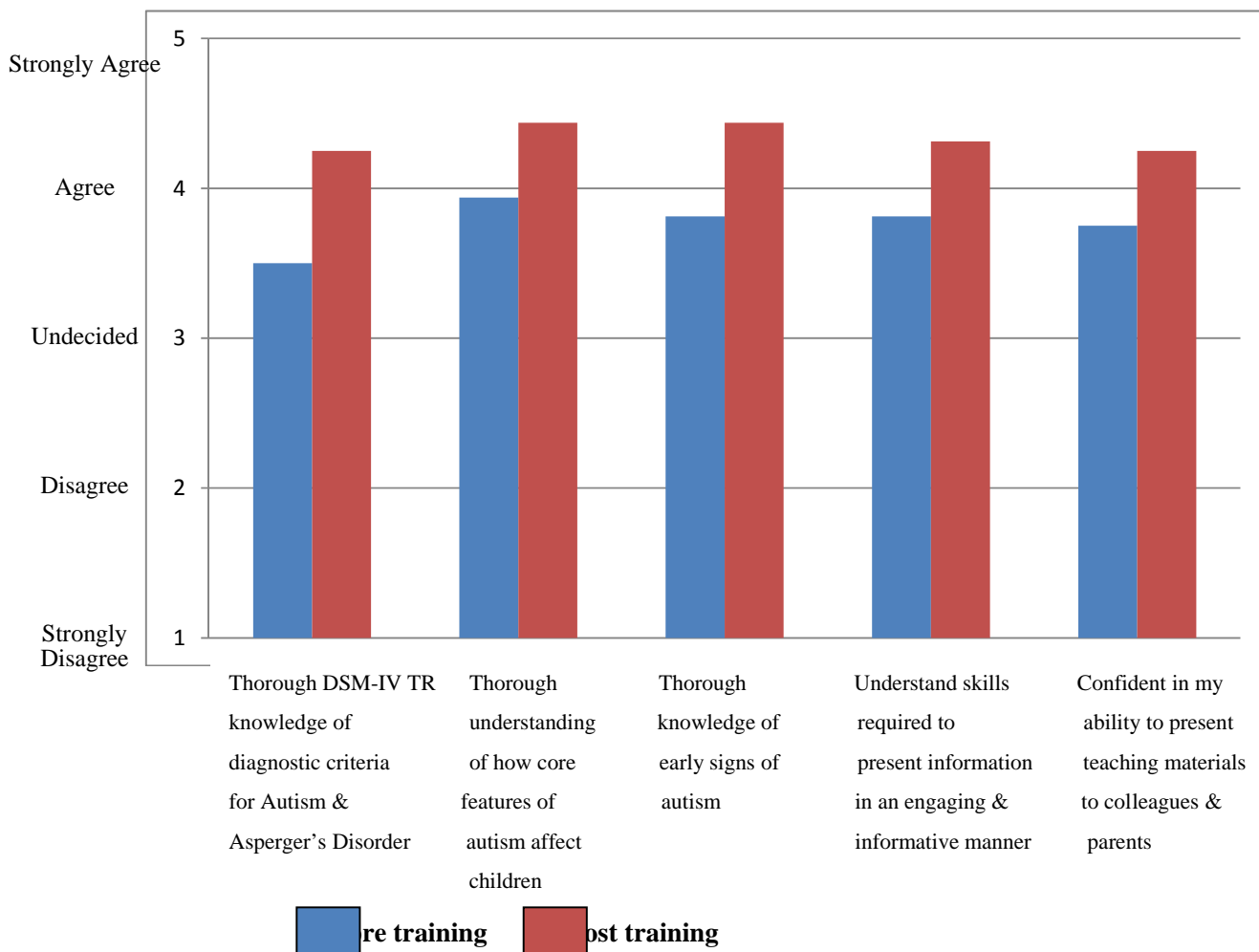
- i) *ASDs in the Preschool Years: A Series of Three Workshops for Early Childhood Professionals'* (Brereton, Bull & Tonge, 2009).

In stage three of the strategy, ACT-NOW developed teaching materials for a series of three 2-hour workshops titled '*ASDs in the Preschool Years: A Series of Three Workshops for Early Childhood Professionals'* (Brereton, Bull & Tonge, 2009). The manual for these workshops was developed to provide Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECIS) with teaching material that could be used to provide ongoing autism training, primarily to the broader early childhood sector, but also for parents of young children. The material was designed to bring parents and professionals together to learn together about the core features of ASDs and how they affect young children's thinking and learning, communication, social relating, play skills, emotions and behaviour, but also to work together to develop inclusive strategies in kindergarten and long-day care settings.

In 2010, Avril Brereton and Kerry Bull provided ‘train-the-presenter’ sessions for 45 ECIS practitioners to enable them to roll out the training in their local area. Evaluations were completed by the practitioners before and after the full-day session to gather information about whether the session had an impact on their knowledge, skills and confidence to roll out the training within their local community.

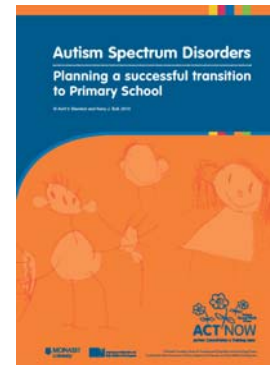
See Table 1.

Table 1. ASDs in the Preschool Years: Train the presenter session. Pre – Post questionnaire. (N=45)



ii) *ASDs: Planning a Successful transition to primary school (Brereton & Bull, 2010).*

Starting school is an important and exciting step for young children and their families, but it can also be a difficult time for some. When a child has an ASD the transition usually involves extra challenges and may be a source of considerable stress and anxiety for parents/carers, professionals and the child. Successful transition to school requires careful planning, preparation and communication that lead to a shared understanding of each child.



In 2010 ACT-NOW developed training material for parents and professionals working in early childhood services, primary schools and specialist schools who are planning the transition for young children with an ASD. The focus of the material is to assist these people (the transition team) to work together to develop a shared understanding of the child and prepare a transition plan. It is not intended to be a crash course in how to teach children with an ASD. It provides basic information about the core features of ASDs and how they affect young children's thinking and learning, communication, social relating, play skills, emotions and behaviour. It also provides templates to guide the transition plan and the gathering of relevant and useful information prior to the student with an ASD coming to school. The manual has been developed to complement the current Victorian DEECD Positive Start to School initiative and was designed to become a useful addition to the education and training programmes currently offered by ECIS practitioners and DEECD Student Support Service Officers (SSSOs).

Following an application process through the ReACTs, four practitioners from each DEECD region were selected to attend a full-day train-the-trainer workshop in August 2010. Each region enrolled two Student Support Services Officers (SSSOs) and two Early Childhood Intervention (ECIS) practitioners to attend the workshop in order to work together and develop a plan for rolling out the training in their own region. By co-presenting the training material the ECIS practitioners and SSSOs were developing very important links with each other and actively collaborating across the pre-school and school programmes.

ACT-NOW provided 'train-the-presenter' sessions for 36 ECIS practitioners and SSSOs. They will receive ACT-NOW accreditation by submitting a film of themselves co-presenting the training programme. Ongoing support for these practitioners was provided by Avril Brereton and Kerry Bull including the opportunity to attend a 'see-one-do-one' session with transition teams in the southern region.

SPECIALIST CONSULTATION

JOURNAL CLUBS

In 2010, a further four power point presentations were posted on the ACT-NOW website. Each power point summarizes a recent and relevant journal article with a view to enabling ECIS practitioners to develop their critical appraisal skills and to keep abreast of new evidence-based interventions and information in high quality peer reviewed journals. ACT-NOW journal club discussions have been held in each region in Victoria. Attending ACT-NOW journal club following the ReACT meeting has encouraged professionals to set time aside to read articles, keep abreast of current research and issues and gain evidence for best practice. Practitioners have also been encouraged to access and use the article presentations within their own regions or workplaces. 2010 journal club presentations included:

- ✓ Randomized Controlled Caregiver Mediated Joint Attention Engagement Intervention for Toddlers with Autism
- ✓ Clinical Characteristics Associated with Language Regression for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders
- ✓ The treatment of food selectivity and other feeding problems in children with autism spectrum disorders
- ✓ Parents' and Professionals' Perceptions of the Implementation of Family-Centred Practices in Child Assessments Mothers' Narratives Regarding their Child Predict Maternal Synchronous Behaviour During Play

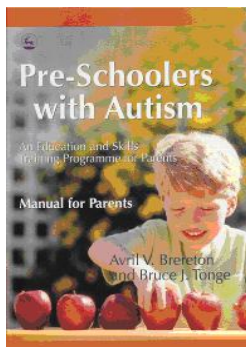
ReACTions NEWSLETTER

In 2010, the ACT-NOW team developed the ReACTions newsletter. ReACTions aims to disseminate information about the ACT-NOW strategy and to provide the regions an opportunity to share information and innovative practices. DEECD ReACT Coordinators work with the ReACT membership to contribute material to the newsletter. Two editions were produced in 2010 and are available on the ACT-NOW website.



PRE-SCHOOLERS WITH AUTISM: AN EDUCATION AND SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAMME FOR PARENTS

'Preschoolers with Autism' (Brereton & Tonge, 2005) is an effective, manualised parent education programme. Throughout the ACT-NOW strategy, Avril Brereton and Kerry Bull have

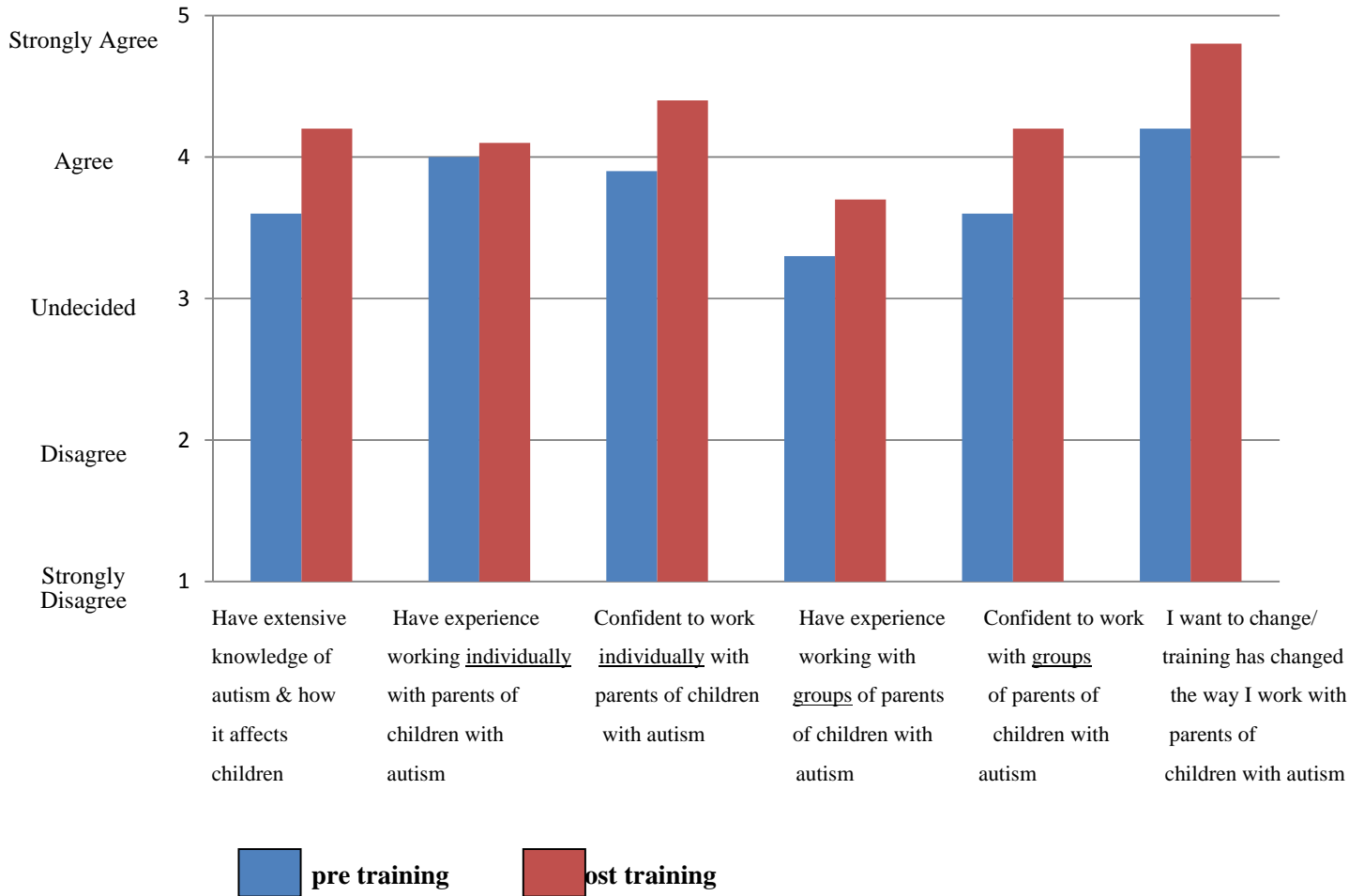


provided training in this programme to experienced ECIS practitioners with a strong background in child development, experience working with children who have autism and their families, and experience in counseling or group work.

In 2010, a further 18 ECIS practitioners attended an intensive 2-day workshop to enable them to deliver the programme to parents within their service. A total of 119 practitioners have now been trained in this evidence-based programme (49 'see-one-do-one' & 70 2-day workshop format) through the ACT-NOW strategy.

Evaluations were completed by the ECIS practitioners before and after the two-day training to gather information about whether the session had an impact on their knowledge, skills and confidence to roll out the training with parents within their local community. See Table 2.

Table 2. Pre-schoolers with Autism Train the trainer workshops. Pre-Post Training Questionnaire (N=18).



MASTER CLASSES

Over 200 practitioners attended the evening Master Class series that were offered by the ACT-NOW project staff at Mindful in 2010.

AUTUMN SERIES

Monday 24th May

1. Update on Gait & Movement studies in Autism & Asperger's Disorder

Dr. Nicole Rinehart Senior Research Fellow, Monash University

2. A Parent education skills training programme for parents of young adolescents with autism

Dr. Avril Brereton Senior Research Fellow, Monash University

Monday 31st May

1. Transcranial magnetic stimulation in ASDs: Working towards new understandings and novel treatments

Dr. Peter Enticott Research Fellow, Monash/Alfred Psychiatry Research Centre

Monday 7th June

1. Assessing behaviour and emotional problems in young children with developmental delay: The development of a new measure

Dr. Kylie Gray Senior Research Fellow, Monash University

2. Outcomes in young children with autism and developmental delay

Dr. Kylie Gray Senior Research Fellow, Monash University

SPRING SERIES

Monday 30th August: Transition to school for children with an ASD

Including the launch of 'ASDs: Planning a successful transition to primary school'

Pippa Procter A/Assistant General Manager, Early Childhood Strategy

Dr. Avril Brereton Senior Research Fellow, Monash University

Monday 6th September: School Readiness

Dr. Tim Moore Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Community Child Health

Kerry Bull Research Fellow, Monash University

Monday 13th September

A panel of experts from Monash University discussed the following questions that were submitted through the ReACTS.

1. *As an OT (newly graduated) working in early intervention I get a lot of referrals asking me to do a sensory profile and write a SI programme. Do OTs have a wider role in intervention for children with autism?*

Dr. Helen Bourke-Taylor

Senior Lecturer, School of Primary Health Care. Monash University

2. *I consult to a child care centre where I see a 5 year old girl who has autism and a severe developmental delay. We wonder if she's is also anxious because she clings to adults at child care and cries easily. Could you please talk about anxiety in young children with autism.*

Prof. Bruce Tonge

Head, School of Psychology and Psychiatry. Monash University

3. *How do you address restricted diet with a child with an ASD when they are not willing to try new foods? Where do you go with a child that is very restricted?*

Dr. Avril Brereton

Senior Research Fellow, School of Psychology and Psychiatry. Monash University

4. *I have a little boy with autism in my early intervention group. He's 4 ½ years old and VERY BUSY. He can't sit still for group activities and can only concentrate on a task for about one minute. Can children with autism also have ADHD? How can I help?*

Prof. Bruce Tonge

Head, School of Psychology and Psychiatry. Monash University

PLANS FOR ACT-NOW IN 2011

- ✓ Ongoing website development
- ✓ An additional 6 factsheets
- ✓ An additional 4 journal club presentations
- ✓ Development of resources for Maternal and Child Health
- ✓ Statewide conference presentation and regional workshops for Maternal and Child Health
- ✓ One-day workshop for ECIS in the 'ASDs in the Preschool Years' training material
- ✓ Three, half-day workshops for ECIS and SSSOs in the 'ASDs: Planning a successful transition to primary school' training materials
- ✓ One two-day workshop for ECIS in the 'Preschoolers with Autism: An educational and skills training programme for parents'
- ✓ One full-day forum for trained ECIS and SSSO in the 'ASDs: Planning a successful transition to primary school'
- ✓ Presentation at PSFO state-wide meeting
- ✓ Quarterly state-wide ReACT Coordinator meetings
- ✓ 2 ReACTions Newsletters
- ✓ Consultation and advise for the ECIS sector and branch