

Media Release

14th August 2010



Children's Services

Since 1895

KU opens NSW's first and only Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre

KU Children's Services today opened a unique early learning centre, incorporating both a mainstream preschool and NSW's first and only Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre. The multi-million dollar facility was built using more than \$1.5million of Commonwealth funding and \$700,000 of KU's own funds, and was officially opened by Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion.

"This is an historic day for early childhood education, particularly for NSW families of children with autism," said Sheridan Dudley, KU's Chief Executive Officer. "KU is very pleased to be playing such an integral role in ensuring that families are able to access quality early intervention support in their local area.

"We are also proud that the development of the new centre assures that KU Liverpool Preschool, which has been providing high quality early childhood education and care to Liverpool families for 62 years, can continue to do so for decades to come, in a purpose built facility."

The KU Marcia Burgess autism centre provides education in a long day care setting, for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) from 6 weeks up to 6 years of age.

"The children's program combines KU's highly regarded play-based approach to early education with the principles of the Early Start Denver Model which focuses on helping children with ASDs to develop play and communication skills, relationships and language," explained Ms Dudley.

Children and families can also access a full range of specialist support services including Paediatrics, Physiotherapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech Pathology and Psychology. These services are delivered as a result of KU's partnerships with Sydney South West Area Health Service, The University of NSW and The Benevolent Society.

"The co-location of the new autism service with the rebuilt KU Liverpool Preschool provides opportunities for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders to engage and interact with their typically developing peers, on a daily basis," Ms Dudley said.

The official opening function was attended by families and children from both services, Commonwealth, State and Local Government representatives, KU's project partners and community members. Senator Hon. Ursula Stephens and KU Chairman, David Bryant, officially cut the ribbons to open the services. After the formalities guests had the opportunity to take a 'behind the scenes' tour of the centre, while children enjoyed face painting and a magic show.

KU currently cares for more than 14,000 children each year in over 150 services nationally, including 3 services in the Liverpool area. KU has been enriching children's lives through early childhood education and care since 1895 and believes that every family should be able to access affordable, high quality early childhood education and care for their children.

KU already supports around 1000 children a year in KU services, who have developmental delays and disabilities including Autism and ASD like symptoms.

The Early Learning and Care Centre Initiative is funded by the Australian Government.

ENDS

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KU Marcia Burgess Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre



The KU Marcia Burgess ASELCC will deliver education and care to children with ASDs up to the age of six, in a long day care setting. It is the first and only Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre in New South Wales.

KU has partnered with Sydney South West Area Health Service (SSWAHS), The University of NSW (UNSW) and The Benevolent Society (TBS), to provide a team of 11 autism trained staff including Early Childhood Teachers, Child Care Workers, a Paediatrician, Physiotherapist, Occupational Therapist, Speech Pathologist and a Psychologist.

All staff will be trained in the Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) to provide intensive intervention for young children with Autism.

What is The Early Start Denver Model?

The Early Start Denver Model is a play-based approach to teaching that focuses on helping children with ASDs develop social communication skills and emphasises the development of play skills, relationships and language.

Since interactions are a primary learning opportunity for toddlers, fewer interactions mean fewer learning opportunities. Young children with autism have a number of developmental delays in many areas by the time they reach the toddler period, and these are the targets of treatment in the ESDM.

Therapists / parents are taught multiple teaching tactics that are associated with growth in the infant's social communication behaviours. Improvements are also noted with respect to the severity of behavioural indicators related to autism between 18 and 24 months of age.

This is an intervention model that equips therapists and parents with the necessary intervention skills to engage, communicate with, and teach their very young children with or at risk for autism.

The building

The KU Marcia Burgess Autism Centre is co-located with KU Liverpool Preschool and beside the Autism Advisory Support Service.

The new centre was designed for KU by Architect, Graeme Butler, and draws on KU's 115 years of experience in early childhood education. It has dedicated indoor and outdoor environments for learning, sensory relaxation and quiet time, as well as large open spaces for gross motor experiences and the release of energy. The building also provides an observation room for research, meeting space for partnering agencies and supports multidisciplinary collaborative teams to provide intervention on site, and to facilitate a range of intervention methods.

The Early Learning and Care Centre Initiative is funded by the Australian Government.



KU Liverpool Preschool

A new beginning



History of KU Liverpool Preschool

This new building will be the 4th home for KU Liverpool Preschool which continues its 62 years of early childhood education. In 1947, the Housing Commission asked the Kindergarten Union to provide a preschool service for children living in emergency housing estates occupied by the Royal Navy.

During the 50's the housing estate was gradually replaced by new homes and the old temporary buildings were demolished. Due to the rise in population, it was clear that a permanent preschool building was needed.

In 1966 the local community banded together with the Lions Club to finance the new building on council owned land. Liverpool Preschool was finally opened in July 1966 and continued on until recently in 2009.

That building served the preschool well, however after 43 years it was desperately in need of expensive repairs and upgrades. When the opportunity to develop the autism centre arose, KU's Board contributed \$700,000 to enable the building of a brand new KU Liverpool Preschool as part of the development. The old preschool was demolished following an emotional ceremony in 2009, making way for the new, purpose built, shared facility.

KU Liverpool Preschool today

KU Liverpool Preschool is now co-located in the new purpose built centre with the KU Marcia Burgess Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre.

The new centre operates Monday to Friday, 9:00am - 3:00pm, during school terms, with a maximum of 30 children each day.

What sets KU Liverpool apart?

- ▶ A safe and stimulating family environment for children aged from 3 to 6 years
- ▶ Qualified, experienced and caring staff
- ▶ Play-based learning programs acknowledging children as capable, resourceful individuals
- ▶ Full transition to school program
- ▶ Fully landscaped outdoor area promoting exploration and discovery of the environment
- ▶ Ongoing, professional support for children with additional needs



About Marcia Burgess



In recognition of Marcia Burgess's outstanding contribution to early childhood, KU has named the centre KU Marcia Burgess Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre in her honour.

Marcia Burgess began her career as a graduate teacher with KU in 1956 and after a 50 year timespan, she retired in September 2006 from KU as the Manager, Special Education.

Throughout her career Marcia was a dedicated early childhood educator and a strong advocate for young children and families. Whilst Marcia took a quiet approach, it was none-the-less driven by strong will, determination and clear vision. Marcia was an active member of the Executive Committee of Early Childhood Australia NSW for many years and a long standing member of Early Childhood Intervention Australia NSW.

When Marcia became the Manager of Special Education, she built on the wonderful work of her KU predecessors and expanded the Special Education Team to the strong and diverse team it is today. Her dreams, vision and advocacy for vulnerable children, children with additional needs and families has become one of KU's greatest achievements. In recognition of her work, Marcia was presented with Achievement Awards from:

- ▶ Early Childhood Intervention Australia (2004)
- ▶ Department of Community Services as part of NSW Children's Week (2006); and
- ▶ In 2007 she was made a Life Member of KU.

To honour her outstanding contribution, KU has established the Marcia Burgess Award. This is given to a staff member each year to enable them to further their professional development in the three main areas that Marcia was passionate about:

- ▶ Child development;
- ▶ Children with additional needs; and
- ▶ Child protection.

Marcia also spent some time as the Director of KU Liverpool Preschool. Sadly Marcia passed away in June 2007.

Marcia was a much-loved member of St Mark's Anglican Church. As a result of her hard work and dedication, the St Mark's Quilters was created to carry on Marcia's legacy.



Saint Mark's Quilters Honour Marcia Burgess



The new KU Marcia Burgess Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre is the recipient of over 80 quilts, handmade by Saint Mark's Quilters in honour of the centres namesake, Marcia Burgess.

The Marcia Burgess Connection

Marcia Burgess was a dedicated member of St Mark's Anglican Church for many years. She also worked as an inspirational early childhood teacher who dedicated her entire career of more than 50 years at KU to ensuring that all children, particularly those with additional needs, were able to access high quality early childhood education and care.

In the time Marcia spent attending St Mark's, she developed friendships with numerous members of the congregation. Her passing had a devastating impact on the church and her large group of friends.

Members of the church were delighted when they were informed the new KU Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre was being named after Marcia Burgess. This presented the opportunity for the Saint Mark's Quilters group to donate their finished quilts to the centre.

The Quilter's Journey

The group from St Mark's Church began honing their quilt making skills in November 2009, embarking together on a five week beginner quiltmaking course- 'Stitchin' Mission'. 'Stitchin' Mission' is a community based project, set up in the United States of America which teaches beginner quiltmaking, while celebrating the shared faith of numerous denominations. The basis of the program is the creation of quilts to be sent to different missions worldwide.

After the 'Stitchin' Mission' five week course ended, the enthusiastic group wished to continue making the quilts for the children and as a result 'St Marks Quilters' was created. The quilters meet for monthly workshops and are passionate about improving their skills at the same time whilst making beautiful quilts for the children.

Word of the project continues to spread, and the collection of quilts has grown steadily with many more quiltmakers eager to help carry on Marcia's legacy.

"It's our prayer that, as each child snuggles into the softness of our quilts, they will feel all the love that has gone into them"



A Background of KU Children's Services



KU Children's Services (KU) is Australia's leading provider of not for profit, community based early childhood education and care.

We are committed to quality and affordability, and our vision is that every family is able to access affordable, high quality early childhood education and care for their children.

Established in 1895, KU operates over 150 children's services nationally including preschools, long day care, out of school hours care, vacation care, occasional care, family programs and other early childhood education and care services.

Through inclusive, play-based programs, KU services provide learning environments that encourage children to develop skills, knowledge, feelings and dispositions that provide a solid foundation for their transition to school and their life-long learning.

What is the *KU difference*?

Educating and caring for young children is a highly specialised role requiring a unique combination of qualifications, experience and a passion for enriching children's lives.

Some of the things that set KU apart from others include:

- ▶ All KU programs are based on experience and evidencebased research. We recognise children as individuals, and focus on their own interests and strengths within a group situation.
- ▶ KU staff are valued and supported in their role as highly qualified early childhood professionals. In turn KU staff nurture a culture of respect, trust and dignity in which the children thrive.
- ▶ We recognise and develop natural environments as ideal places for learning. Our strong focus on environmental awareness and sustainability is reflected in our practices and programs.
- ▶ Each KU centre is supported by a team of Special Education professionals, ensuring children with additional needs are welcomed, included and nurtured.
- ▶ KU is proudly a not-for-profit organisation. Children are our central focus, not profits. All fees, funding and resources are directed towards delivering affordable, high quality education and care.

