

Spring/Summer 2008

the bi-annual **Newsletter**

Reason to celebrate!

Each success is celebrated at Cheshire School and, over the last twelve months, 6 year old Prep student Josh has celebrated several. One really special celebration came about when Josh was announced the overall winner in the junior section of the annual Waverley Art Competition for Primary Schools. The competition, which had an Olympic theme, was sponsored by MP's Maxine Morand and Gavin Jennings and attracted more than 400 entries from 12 schools.

Josh came to Cheshire school because of the behavioural difficulties he was displaying at pre-school. There was a substantial risk that he would not have a positive start to his schooling, potentially setting the scene for ongoing problems. Instead, during his time at Cheshire, Josh's teacher has provided him with a structured, creative, engaging and supportive learning environment where he has been taught how to manage his anxiety, behave appropriately and utilise strategies that will help him to make a successful transition into Grade One of a mainstream school next year.

In his fourth and final term at Cheshire, Josh is now a flourishing student, increasingly confident in his overall abilities and engaged in learning as well as enjoying many other Cheshire school experiences such as fishing, gymnastics and circus school. But it's his artistic talent that really impresses his teacher and other staff – he shows some real promise!

Our generous supporters and donors are part of the reason Cheshire continues its success in assisting children with significant social, emotional and behavioural problems. The Cheshire Program develops self-esteem, resilience and coping strategies and by facilitating a change in behaviours allows children to successfully re-integrate into the mainstream school system, positively equipped to cope with the challenges ahead.

More Information:
cheshire@bestchance.org.au
www.bestchance.org.au



From the CEO

I write this column at a time of great uncertainty – deep concerns about the environment, street violence, the world's governments and their banks struggling to put order back into what seems to be chaos...



It's trite, but children are the future, and whilst we strive to overcome today's problems, we mustn't lose sight of our obligation to ensure that they will have the resilience to cope with whatever befalls them. This Newsletter has many references to 'resilience', stories of children and their families who are learning to cope with, and move on from, difficulties that might otherwise have limited their lives. Over many past editions, we have told our readers about the way that research into early childhood development influences our planning, and we now feel it is time to use our Newsletter to provide parenting tips reflecting the way we are applying that research in **bestchance**. We hope our article summarising a recent presentation by Michael Grose will be interesting, and useful, to you and your wider families.

I am very proud to report that **bestchance** was recently awarded the 'Monash Business Award 2007-8' for 'Innovation'. It may seem strange that a charity would feel such pride in a business award, but we appreciate it for the recognition that we have applied sound business principles to the provision of innovative, caring services, meeting what we believe is a major obligation to our supporters.

As we approach the end of another year, I thank all those who make what we do possible. Governments fund around 40% of our costs, so the ongoing support of philanthropic trusts, service clubs, corporate and private donors and our many volunteers who add enormous value to our work is vital. In these difficult times, we will need your help even more!

To all our readers, I extend my best wishes for the holiday season, and a happy New Year.

Lodi Francesconi

With help from **bestchance**, life's more of a party



Imagine you have two beautiful sons – two year old twins – but you know that something isn't quite right with one of them. One seems to be developing, enjoying playing among other children, imitating grown-ups, using some words and phrases, whereas the other seems to be displaying extra aggression and entirely different behavioural changes. It starts getting to the point you are becoming scared of your own child.

Mum, Traci from Mitcham doesn't need to imagine the 'what if' of this story – it was her reality! Brodie was four years old before it was identified that he was experiencing emotional, social and

developmental delay and also had a serious speech problem. Traci finally understood why he would get angry and frustrated much easier than his brother Jye. He had such problems socialising that friendships with other children became difficult, and it was obvious that he was often left off party invitations.

A year ago Traci was actually scared of Brodie, however since the diagnosis of his learning and speech disabilities led to the family's involvement with the **bestchance** Early Childhood Intervention ('ECI') program, Traci says that they can now again enjoy the company of others. 'He's still very challenging, but I can take him out, and he is a lot calmer'. She sees it as wonderful progress.

Brodie attends the **bestchance** ECI program one day per week with his Mum where, in a small group run by occupational and speech therapists, they learn and apply techniques to support his development and improve his motor skills. With the assistance of

a support worker Traci has been able to enrol him in a community kindergarten three days per week and to attend child care where he is socialising with other children his own age.

bestchance has based one of its strategies on DIR®/Floortime™, an internationally recognised model for the treatment of children who have difficulty communicating with adults and peers. In 2007, as part of its commitment to achieve best practice in the provision of children's and family services, the organisation underwrote and promoted DIR®/Floortime™ Training for early childhood intervention professionals in Melbourne. Karen, the Program Leader, comments: 'Since incorporating some of the principals of DIR®/Floortime™ in the treatment of children within the program, we have observed a significant improvement in the progress of our children with autism spectrum disorder, development delays and a range of other developmental issues.'

Karen and her team are very conscious that their work in the Early Childhood Intervention program has a very significant

Put a sausage on the barbie...

Have you ever pondered how to describe something that is quite complex in operation but very simple in purpose? When you next get into a car, think about all the systems that interact to propel you between points A and B. If any one of them doesn't work, chances are you won't be reaching point B.

But you wouldn't ordinarily describe a car as 'a vehicle with four wheels, usually propelled by an internal combustion engine and a complex array of electronic, electrical, mechanical, pneumatic and hydraulic systems that work in an integrated manner to transport passengers over land'. You are more likely to say something like 'It's a personal transport.'

At **bestchance**, we've been pondering more effective ways to tell people about what we do. Our Committee has been seeking a 'barbecue



statement' that would give a simple conversational opening to arouse the interest of someone unfamiliar with the organisation. 'Well, we run several programs that meet both the routine and special needs of children and families...' – not very exciting!

But that's what we do, and we're proud of it! And we understand that's why many people support what we do. Our supporters seem to agree that prevention is better than cure, and that it makes sense to provide services

that make positive differences to the lives of children and families.

The key to making that difference is, in the view of **bestchance**, the integration of services, dealing in a seamless way with all those issues that could affect the future resiliency of a child or family. What is this resiliency we seek? A simple definition is 'the ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change'. Our goal is to empower children and families by helping them to develop self-awareness and coping skills to keep themselves on track.

We do this because world-wide research has shown that most serious teenage problems are embedded in early childhood issues and many early childhood issues are the result of serious family problems.

When you think about it, what we do is at the leading edge of reducing youth homelessness, suicide and family breakdown – now that's exciting!



Kindergarten
parents listen
to Michael Grose

Parenting Skills: Raising happy resilient children

continued...

impact on many aspects of family life, both now for the parents who are extremely anxious about their children's futures and for the future potential of the children themselves. But Traci sums it up more simply, in a way we can all relate to: 'Brodie is now getting invitations to birthday parties.'

*(We thank 'The Age' for its recent acknowledgement of the positive role of **bestchance** in assisting Traci and Brodie. Through this Newsletter story, **bestchance** acknowledges the positive role of its supporters who provide the resources that enable the innovative delivery of its services.)*

More Information:

earlyintervention@bestchance.org.au
www.bestchance.org.au
www.floorstime.org

Leaving a Bequest

You could leave a lasting legacy and help to ensure the well-being of children and families into the future. If you would like more information, please call us on 8562 5100.

continued...

But we focus on prevention of the crisis, rather than waiting until the crisis occurs.

Many readers of this Newsletter share our passion for prevention. We thank you for your loyalty and our shared belief. If you get the chance, maybe at a summer barbecue, why not tell someone about the **bestchance** organisation that works to reduce youth homelessness, suicide and family breakdown? Maybe they will want to become a supporter too.

More Information:

www.bestchance.org.au
community@bestchance.org.au
volunteers@bestchance.org.au

As we protect children from disappointment and frustration in their lives, are we really preparing them to deal with whatever may come their way? Are we so busy rushing and organising our children's day that they miss the opportunity to experience life for themselves, to experience real satisfaction and happiness?

These are just two of the questions put forward by Australia's leading parenting presenter, Michael Grose, as the lead up to a recent evening seminar for parents of children attending the 12 preschools in the **bestchance** Kindergarten Cluster.

A packed audience in our Children's Centre listened as Michael entertainingly discussed the four stages of children's development, the significance of birth order and the ways that parents can help their children to become resilient teenagers and adults.

We asked Michael for some tips to pass on to our Newsletter readers and he gave us seven *Resiliency Robbers*, traps that parents unwittingly fall into while doing what they think is best for their children:

- **Robber #1:** fighting all their battles for them. Your help should be the last resort, not the first option if you want to give kids the opportunity to develop their own resourcefulness.
- **Robber #2:** making their problem your problem. Sometimes parents take too much responsibility for things children can really work out or decide for themselves.
- **Robber #3:** giving them too much voice. It's easy to go overboard
- **Robber #4:** putting unrealistic or relentless pressure on them to perform. Whilst expectations about success and achievement are important, too high and they give up, and too much they may become anxious. Keep expectations in line with abilities and encourage achievement, but don't pressurise.
- **Robber #5:** letting them give in too easily. Resilient learners link success with effort, so encourage children to complete what they have started even if the results aren't perfect. (That includes the non-winning sporting team as well as more complex school activities.)
- **Robber #6:** neglecting the development of independence. Don't wait until children are teenagers to develop the skills of independent living. Don't routinely do for kids what they can do for themselves – give them the opportunity to learn to look after themselves if you are not around.
- **Robber #7:** rescuing them from challenging or stretching situations. We all have to learn to deal with situations outside our comfort zones. For children, this might be giving a talk, singing in a concert or going on a school camp, so accept that children will generally cope, show confidence in them and skill them up, rather than opting for avoidance – overcoming challenges enables them to grow and improve.

*(This is the first of ongoing articles aim to assist our readers to understand the practical application of the research on which **bestchance** early childhood programs are now based. We hope that these parenting tips from Michael's presentation will be food for thought for all our readers, whether parents, grandparents or just interested onlookers.)*

More information: earlyyears@bestchance.org.au or Michael's website, www.parentingideas.com.au

Christmas cheer

What do you do when there's no money to celebrate Christmas? With the economy in the shape it is, just paying normal utilities' bills and providing staple foods can be a major hurdle, let alone having a little extra for family treats. When the idea of trying to celebrate Christmas becomes a burden too heavy to bear, **bestchance** will, with your help, again be there to ease the load.

Meet Nicole, a sole parent with the responsibility of looking after two Primary aged children. Nicole experienced some personal adversity this year that resulted in severe and crippling depression. Nicole fought hard, but eventually she was unable to sustain her full time job, and became unemployed. Nicole's priority is providing a stable home environment for her two children, but with no additional family support it came to the point where she

needed to reach out for help, and that's where **bestchance** has stepped in. Additional to other supports, we want to offer Jackie and many families like hers a joyous Christmas. Our Wishing Tree assists families who are less fortunate by providing staple foods, a special festive treat and a gift that parents can give to each child as their own when, otherwise, none could have been given.

You can help spread the joy of the Christmas season by selecting a gift tag from the Christmas tree in our foyer during November and purchasing a gift for a child to the value of \$25. Alternatively, you could contribute some non perishable foods that can be included in the hampers, or simply make a donation by phoning our Receptionist on 8562 5100.

The Wishing Tree is a part of the broader assistance offered by the Community Support program at **bestchance**.



Individuals and families can experience crisis at any time of their life and in unexpected ways. This program is there to help with the immediate needs – talking through the key issues, accessing information, advocacy, food parcels, casseroles (prepared by our loyal volunteers) and even material aid such as clothing, household items and second hand furniture – and then to help clients develop strategies and skills that will empower them to avert or alleviate similar situations in the future.

More Information:
support@bestchance.org.au,
www.bestchance.org.au

Children's Week 2008

bestchance celebrated National Children's Week in October with an Open Day and its annual Celebration Service at the Police Academy Chapel, Glen Waverley.

The Open Day was fun for young and old, with a children's art show, jumping castle, trash and treasure, fancy dress, food stalls and program displays. The Celebration Service, celebrating those who work with children, was attended by representatives from many children's organisations throughout Melbourne. Candles were lit to represent each of those services.



Huntingtower String Orchestra performs at the Celebration Service



Happy customers of Open Day face painting stall

bestchance offers a range of early intervention, development and support programs for children, individuals and families. Further information can be found at bestchance.org.au

Early Intervention

- Early Childhood Intervention
- Parent and Child Support

Child Care and Kindergarten Services

- Long Day Child Care
- Sessional Care
- Kindergarten
- Kindergarten Cluster Management

Primary Education

- Cheshire School

Youth and Adult Programs

- Vocational Training
- Community Education
- Foundation for Homeless Youth
- Community Support

CHILD FAMILY CARE
bestchance

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Making a difference in your community

Privacy Assurance. **bestchance** abides by the Privacy Principles contained in the Commonwealth Privacy Act 2000 and the Information Privacy Act (Vic) 2000. Any information you provide will be held securely and your privacy respected. For further information please telephone 8562 5100.

