

DECEMBER 2011



Learning for Life



RECYCLEBALL 2011 NOVEMBER 18TH everything old is new again...

We had such fun at our RecycleBall. Fashions as usual were stunning, photos will be posted on the last page of this report. There were vintage clothes (see Bev's collection above which were modeled by our committee and friends), clothes fashioned from newspaper/magazine pages, hessian and plastic suit carrier bags! We had people pull all sorts of things out of their wardrobes from different eras, a french legionnaire uniform, going away and 21st outfits from the past and wedding dresses. Opp shop fashions looked very stylish and recycled materials were used to fashion ties, bowties and hats. All very creative and innovative.

Wilbur Wilde, Wendy Stapleton and the Troublemakers got everyone groovin' and we were entertained by a fabulous Harlem Shout Swing Patrol troupe which were vibrant and got the party happening.

Thanks to our production support Bart Power and his team from Austage and Johnson Audio, our brilliant auctioneer Antony Woodley and Leonda by the Yarra.

**THANKS TO THE BALL
COMMITTEE & OUR
HOST TOM GLEISNER
FOR A GREAT NIGHT**

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR GUESTS WHO ATTENDED THE RECYCLEBALL. \$60,000 WAS RAISED PLUS MORE THAN \$10,000 IN DONATIONS FROM THOSE WHO COULDN'T ATTEND. WE COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT OUR SPONSORS

GOLD SPONSORS

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L4LIFE INFORMATION

SESSION

TUESDAY 13TH DEC

7.30PM

You are invited to come and hear about the L4life programs, early home based intensive intervention (ABA) and primary school behavioural consultancy service. We will have some of our clinical staff and committee members available to talk to after a short presentation about our vision and work.

Register your interest at

[http://
learningforlife.eventbrite.com](http://learningforlife.eventbrite.com)

Any queries contact

Mary@learningforlife.com.au

There are several places for children in our programs for 2012. It is a good opportunity for anyone who would like to hear in more detail about our work, including supporters or prospective families.



Neil Mitchell 3AW & Harvey Norman \$10,000 Charity Competition....L4life won one of the 4 Give Aways!!!!

This is wonderful news and we will spend it on iPads to use in our programs. The Apps for people with ASD are amazing covering things like picture communication systems, text to talk, scheduling, data collection, social and emotional programs, educational programs and more. Facetime and videos will allow distance supervision of programs in some cases saving travel time as L4life service families all over Melbourne and consult with experts from interstate and overseas.

MAYOR OF BOROONDARA TO VISIT L4LIFE

L4life received a Boroondara Grant for a Computer and Camera for \$1668 needed for our work. Melanie Larkey, Executive Officer, and Christine Darcas, our new Trusts and Foundations Co-ordinator went to and evening of celebration at Boroondara Shire Offices recently and invited the Mayor to visit Friday 9th Dec. It will be nice to share our work, introduce him to some local L4life supporters, staff, parents and even one of our stars at work.





THE HEARTACHE OF AUTISM THROUGH THE EYES OF MUM

Mark was the most beautiful baby; he was happy, engaging and would captivate and charm everyone he came in contact with. He had the biggest smile and an infectious laughter. He was reaching all his milestones; he was talking, walking, engaging and being a most sociable young man.

At 14 months, his and our world started to change. He wasn't happy any more, he stopped talking, he stop looking and stopped most things. He sat alone on his chair all day retreating to a place where we were no longer a part.

He would wake up crying hysterically through a piercing scream that would not stop for what seems like hours, refusing any comfort. It was like he no longer knew us, like he was frightened of us. He was alone scared and nothing seemed to help. We were losing our child and there seemed to be no help or hope for him.

I was consumed with grief and my only focus was to find some answers to help for him. It was a battle for my husband to acknowledge the changes happening, let alone accept the seriousness of the situation. It was a greater battle to obtain a diagnosis as the medical profession favour the 'wait and see approach'. Although, by now, I knew deep down what the diagnosis would be, nothing prepares you for the words "I'm sorry, your son has autism"

Initially, I felt numb, and then the tears poured down my face as we drove back in silence. I felt sick to my stomach and I couldn't breathe. I would give my life to change things for my little boy but I was helpless to make things right for him.

It was hard to accept that our son has ASD and that there are no answers in how a child can develop normally and then regress so severely. It was hard to explain to our families, to help them accept the situation, while at the same time we were dealing with our own grief. Autism is not a diagnosis that only affects the child, it affects the family and everyone who loves him. It affects the dynamics in the home, the relationships between the parents and the siblings. Nothing and no-one is ever the same.

We urgently needed to help our child but were faced with little assistance and information regarding any available services. In our darkest hours, we were given a maze to work through to get to the other to help our son but no one to guide us.

We had attempted to place Mark in an autism specific childcare centre for a few hours for a few weeks. The centre was new and not ready to commence their program. Mark was distressed and crying hysterically for the short times he was there and it was distressing for me too. I would break down constantly as I watched him not coping to the point I became hospitalised with a stress related condition. Due to my poor health at the time, I was housebound for several months. The centre was no longer feasible but now I was left with no therapy options for him.

Prior to Mark attending the centre, I had made enquiries about ABA therapies and had initial discussions with L4L. I was thoroughly impressed with L4L and I felt that this would be better option for my child but it was not a financial reality at the time. It is the hardest thing to know your child needs help but not being able to provide it to them.

We went back to L4L and with their help found a way to make it possible.

Initially, having therapists coming to our home, a place where Mark felt safe, made it easier for us to transition. There is a lot of discussion that goes on beforehand; there is a lot of time spent gaining Mark's trust and it is all done at a pace that the child can work. The staff are genuine, passionate, and very professional.

It is a huge commitment for the family and undertaking an ABA program is a not a decision to be taken lightly.

The daily lack of privacy in your home takes some adjusting. The staff are lovely and very considerate. It gives us piece of mind knowing that our child is getting the therapy he need and comforting to know he is home and we are able to see how he is doing at all times.

Mark's older sister is 4 years old. Through her eyes, she sees the L4L girls here daily, playing games, laughing and praising her little brother and not her. This has been difficult for her although we try to explain that the staff are here to help her brother so that one day he can talk and play with her. We explained our concerns to the L4L team who have taken this on board by including her in therapy where possible. She has become a promising little therapist in the making.

Life is never the same. There is no break for autism. It is constantly in your thoughts and you never stop worrying for the child with autism, for the sibling who may never have a proper relationship with her brother, for what sort of life your child will have, will he be happy? Will he be independent? Who will look after him after we are gone? Will his sibling be forced to take on some type of carer role?

Relationships between your partner and other children are affected. There is a certain amount of guilt that seems to come with parenting, but now you can double and triple it.

The financial toll is immense, it is difficult for a family to cover the cost of ABA therapy and it usually involves substantial sacrifices. This causes further stresses on the families.

With Mark's needs and the state of my health, returning to work is no longer an option for me. My husband tries his best to provide for us and to cover all the additional costs but he is fighting a losing battle. I can see at times that it's all too much but for him but we have no choice.

Mark will be three soon. He has come a long way but will still need a few more years with L4L. We hope to be able to give him this opportunity.

Adding to the financial woes is the cost of childcare and then finding an appropriate centre that can cater to an ASD child.

As far as free time goes, it's non-existent. There is no break, there is no respite. This is now my life and I have to accept that this is the way it's going to be.

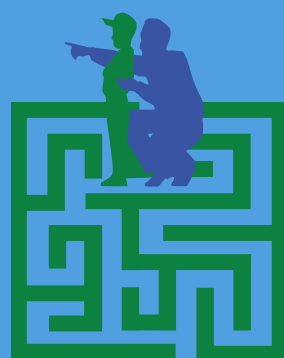
People are unsure how to respond to him. They will attempt to engage and talk but when there is no response, they don't know how to proceed to get through to him and they usually stop trying. Children seem oblivious to him in most occasions although sometimes his behaviour will draw their attention.

My son has come a long way since his diagnosis and especially since we have started with L4L. He is happy, he is learning and evolving every day and he is saying some words.

We still have a long journey ahead, but slowly we are seeing more and more of the boy that once used to be. With the help of this program and with the help of the wonderful staff at L4L, we have hope for his future.

Mark is a beautiful little angel and we are privileged to be his parents. It will take a little more time and patience to get to know him but he is so worth it. He may be different, but he would not hurt a fly, so don't be scared... keep saying hello and he may give a big infectious smile in return.

You know what is best for child and don't ever stop fighting for them... you are their voice



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