

# RETHINKING AUTISM

## AUTISM WEST SYMPOSIUM 2016

# THE PROGRAM

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**Opening 8.45am Friday 4<sup>th</sup> November**

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**Welcome to Country – Shaun Nannup**

**Opening – Hon. Donna Faragher, Minister for Disability Services**

**Engaging Neurodiverse Individuals: The Power of Acceptance and Positivity - Chris Ulmer**

We each have a profound power within us, that when harnessed correctly, can enable us to form meaningful relationships with anyone, neurodiverse or otherwise. The fear that comes from not knowing how to access this power, has detrimental impacts. We've all seen the effects first hand through bullying and the isolation of the neurodiverse community from the rest of society. In order to create a world of universal acceptance, we have to get past the fear of the unknown and our pre-disposition with labels. I have made it my life's mission to normalise the diversity of the human condition by showcasing how a little understanding, positivity, and acceptance can make a better world for all.

*Chris Ulmer, lovingly referred to as Mr. Chris, began his career as a special education teacher in Jacksonville, Florida. After spending three years with the same students he observed a disconnect between his pupils and society. The intelligence and humour displayed by his students was not typically appreciated by those without special needs experience. For this reason, Mr. Chris started Special Books by Special Kids, a multi-media non-profit that is now spearheading a worldwide acceptance movement. Chris dedicates his time to traveling around the world and teaching others about neurodiversity; performing speaking engagements and interviewing neurodiverse individuals to be featured on SBSK.*

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**Break-out Sessions 10.00am Friday 4<sup>th</sup> November**

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**Why Is Reinforcement a Dirty Word? - Regina Ledo**



There are over 40 years of peer-reviewed, scientific research documenting the successful use of reinforcement procedures to shape and strengthen behaviours. However the term reinforcement often evokes resistance from the therapeutic community, schools and parents, particularly when discussing interventions for individuals on the Autism Spectrum. In this presentation, Regina will address the difference between bribery and reinforcement, discuss reinforcement in terms of motivation, and provide arguments for the use of reinforcement in interventions to promote successful learning and positive behavior change. This presentation is suitable for both parents and professionals. At the conclusion, participants will have an understanding of what is meant by the term reinforcement, and how to identify potential sources of motivation for their child or client.

*Regina Ledo is a psychologist with over 20 years experience in working with individuals with autism and their families. She returned to Perth in 2011 after working for 13 years at the Princeton Child Development Institute (PCDI) - a private, centre-based, intensive educational program for children and adults with autism. A founding participant in the Murdoch University Young Autism Project, she is currently in private practice, consulting to families and agencies supporting individuals with ASD and intellectual disability.*

## **NDIS and Autism – Louise Glanville**

The NDIS promises great opportunities for autistic children and adults.

There is more to the NDIS than just direct funding and we all need to be aware of the full range of opportunities available, in addition to direct funding. How will the NDIS make the most of opportunities to use information, linkages and capacity building to address the barriers and obstacles for people with autism? How can the NDIS support sustainable strategies such as peer support and self-advocacy through information and networks so people with autism can support each other? How do we provide enablement for us all to face challenges and recognise opportunities with or without direct funding?

This session aims to provide information about the current direction of the NDIS with attendees walking away with a better understanding of their NDIS journey and hearing about a number of challenges that should invigorate us all.

*Louise Glanville commenced with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) in February 2014 as Deputy Chief Executive Officer (DCEO) and General Manager of the Governance Division. In October 2015, Louise was appointed as the Deputy CEO Stakeholder Relations at the NDIA.*

*Louise has previously held Senior Executive roles at the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department and the Victorian Department of Justice, and also held positions in academia, the private sector and ministerial offices.*

*Louise holds a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Social Work from Melbourne University, a Bachelor of Laws from Monash University and a Master of Arts (Research) from Victoria University.*



## **Role of Interoception - Dr Emma Goodall**

This presentation introduces and explains interoception and the role it plays in enabling both children and adults to connect to themselves, and to others. It explores how teaching interoception can be done explicitly, and how research has demonstrated that this teaching can support the development of socio-emotional skills, and improve student engagement and learning in schools and pre-schools. Using examples from secondary school and adults, the role of interoception activities in preventing meltdowns and managing emotional expressions will be discussed.

*Dr Emma Goodall is the Senior Autism Advisor for the Department for Education and Child Development in South Australia. She is responsible for the review of programs, and development and implementation of research based policy and programs to enable students on the autism spectrum to flourish in the education system. Emma is an experienced autism consultant and educator, blogger and published author who combines her professional and academic skills and knowledge with her lived experience of Aspergers to help people understand what it means to be on the autistic spectrum.*

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### **Break-out Sessions 11.30am Friday 4<sup>th</sup> November**

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#### **We Know We Are Different – Understanding the basics for ASD – Dr Julian Heng**

It is now clear that the unique spelling of our genetic code can explain why a child is autistic. In some cases, this unique spelling may be inherited from their parents, while in other cases it would appear not. If we can diagnose how genes are responsible for autism, we will better understand the many and varied forms of this condition so as to enable families to adopt specific, personalised therapies for their autistic child to support their everyday living.

In this presentation Julian explains how his work on the genetics of brain development can help us pinpoint the unique DNA codes for autism. Perhaps most importantly, he will explain why it is important for all of us to be involved in autism research, and why those who volunteer will be among the first to benefit from the discoveries leading to earlier detection and intervention for affected children. The goal is to end the diagnostic journey for children with autism.

*Dr Julian Heng attained his Bachelor of Science from University of Western Australia, followed by a PhD in developmental neuroscience at the University of Melbourne, working at the Howard Florey Institute. Having trained as a CJ Martin Fellow, and as a MRC Career Development Fellow at the National Institute for Medical Research in the UK, he was appointed Group Leader at the Australian Regenerative Medicine Institute in 2010, and received a Career Development Award. In 2014, he relocated his research to the Harry*



*Perkins Institute of Medical Research in Perth, WA to establish the Brain Growth and Disease Laboratory.*

## **Rethinking the Place of Adolescents and Children with ASD in the Education System - Dr John Wray and Dr John O'Rourke**

This session examines the place of children and adolescents with ASD in the education system. John Wray and John O'Rourke will provide case studies and discuss controversial issues such as integration, segregation, seclusion and containment.

*Dr John Wray is a Western Australian trained paediatrician who undertook a Fellowship in Neurodevelopmental Paediatrics at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, USA. John is Clinical Director of the Child Development Service of Perth, and has a small private practice. He sees a wide range of children with developmental concerns and his main research interest is in the biological basis and treatment of children with autism. John is particularly interested in the controlled investigation of complementary and alternative therapies, and in longitudinal studies of the biology of the Autism Spectrum disorders. Other professional interests include developmental disorder prevention and enhancement programs. He is active in a number of community and professional organisations.*

*Dr John O'Rourke is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Education, Edith Cowan University. Having undergraduate qualifications in special education, he has worked as a secondary teacher in a variety of pastoral care and co-ordinator roles focused on supporting students with additional needs. He now lectures in special education/inclusive pedagogy related units, and co-ordinates post-graduate courses including the newly established Graduate Certificate Special Education: Complex Communication Needs. His research interests are varied, and he has published on inclusive pedagogies, support mechanisms for students with additional needs, digital game-based technology, happiness, student retention at university and inclusion in university environments.*

## **Speaking out about Autism - Paula Smith (facilitator), Judith Chambers, Charles Winning and Cassidy Zelinka**

Paula will talk about her role as the *Autism West Speaks Out* Ambassador and public speaking program facilitator, and she will be joined by a number of individuals with autism who will share their journey with autism.

*Paula Smith, Autism West Speaks Out Ambassador and mother of a young man with autism, has been inspiring audiences for over 25 years with her dynamic and inspiring presentations. An experienced presenter, workshop leader and coach, she is also the author of *Speaking in the Shower*, *Powerful Presentation Principles*, and the number 1 best-selling book *Sell Your Story*, and a leading authority on standing up and speaking out. She was awarded the CSP (Certified Speaking Professional) designation by the National Speakers*



*Association, one of only a small number of professional speakers to hold this designation worldwide.*

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## **Plenary Session 12.30pm Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> November**

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### **The True Experts In Autism – But Are We Listening? - Judy Brewer**

One of the most exciting and important changes in the autism landscape in recent years has been the desire and empowerment of autistic adolescents and adults to have their voice heard in the public arena and to therefore influence decision making in this area. While parents and families are often acknowledged as those with the greatest life experience of autism and therefore have been responsible for many of the key initiatives that have changed service delivery and public policy over recent years, the truth is that no-one understands autism as much as someone for whom being autistic is part of their intrinsic self. They have the answers and are keen to share, but in order for this rich resource to inform autism policy and direction, we all have to change to go beyond tokenism and existing inclusion frameworks to a fully integrated approach, respectful of the wisdom and experience inherent in our vibrant autistic community.

*Judy Brewer is the Chair of the national Co-operative Research Centre for Living With Autism (Autism CRC), and a regular speaker and writer on issues relating to autism, neurodiversity and family carers. As a parent of a young adult with autism, she has had an executive capacity in many autism and carer advocacy organisations, including the Autism Council of Australia, Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia, and the Asia Pacific Autism Conference (Ambassador). Judy has been appointed to a range of Federal and State Government Committees.*

*In 2013 Judy was awarded the Asia Pacific Autism Award, and is a Life Member and former co-Patron of Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect). On Australia Day 2016 she was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for services to autism, education, rural women and refugee families.*

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## **Plenary Session 2.30pm Friday 4<sup>th</sup> November**

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### **Q&A – Post School – What Is Out There?– Facilitated by Gerry Gannon with Professor Torbjorn Falkmer, Joan McKenna Kerr, Will Rosewarne, Karen Huberman and Louise Sheehy**

The transition from school to life beyond school can be daunting. There are a range of options, but which is one is right? During this session we will hear from several panellists, who will provide information about some of the services and opportunities available and insight into the post-school environment.



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## Opening 8.30am Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November

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### Transitioning to Open-Plan Work Environments – A Plan for Failure?

- Will Rosewarne

The post-secondary school world for young people on the autism spectrum can be daunting, with 82% not obtaining a post-secondary qualification and 52% being unemployed. Those who are employed face significant challenges in securing employment and navigating the complex maze of cultural integration, performance management and career progression.

Discussions surrounding these barriers to success are relatively commonplace. However, one barrier often overlooked is the physical environment. As technological advances re-determine what work is done and by whom, changes in physical architecture dictate the practical aspects of carrying out job roles, and how teams collaborate with one another. Will will critically discuss how widespread shifts towards open-plan work environments not only negatively impacts on productivity, confidentiality and wellbeing of employees in general, but can also be hostile to those with sensory differences.

*Will works in Corporate Governance/Legal Services and is Stakeholders Director at the I CAN Network. As an adult with autism, and with a background in law and the Australian Defence Forces, Will brings a fresh perspective to his role as a speaker.*

*“I am a fiercely driven individual. I also have autism. These identities are in no way independent of each other, and rather, I see my autism as a huge strength. My imagination, creativity and interest in new things has often allowed me to operate in a different space to many of my peers. I have a constantly active and inquisitive mind that is open to, and often years, for learning. My autism is an asset, not a hindrance to me reaching my full potential. The prevailing societal attitude towards autism is overwhelmingly negative. I believe that changing this perspective is the first step towards helping others on the spectrum reach their full potential.”*

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## Break-out Sessions 9.15am Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> November

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### Commonalities: Meaning Making in Interactions with Neurodiverse Individuals – Chris Ulmer

During this breakout session you will learn to identify the subtle cues that, while often differ from social norms, indicate a neurodiverse individuals desire to communicate and connect. Explore ways to not only make notice of these attempts, but to utilize them as opportunities to strengthen your relationship with your neurodiverse students and clients. Whether your student scripts, asks questions that they already know the answer too, or simply makes observations of the world around them, these behaviours indicate a want to connect with others, but a lack of understanding of how to do it. An attentive eye and understanding mind



will deepen your interactions, elevate your teaching practices, and refine your work as a service provider.

### **Fathering Kids with Autism – Karl Paganin, Nic Chambers, Clayton Bolger and Wayne Owston**

Four Dads of kids on the autism spectrum share their stories; the highs, the lows, the joys and challenges. The voice of fathers is often not as loud as it could be, and this session offers a chance to hear personal stories and to ask questions from the ultimate fathering experts, Dads.

### **Stories and Stages: How Drama and Narrative skills can help children with Autism develop complex social-emotional reasoning - Darin Cairns**

Narrative has been known to play a significant role in human development and functioning for almost half a century or more. The role of story can be consistently found in evolutionary theories associated with cultural transmission and group dynamics. Furthermore, narrative concepts are known to underlie memory and concepts of self (ie identify) and other (eg theory of mind). Drama groups allow for these processes and mechanisms to be distilled, highlighted, reflected upon and rehearsed in a non-stigmatising and functional way. In addition, with the advent of technology for recording, other evidence based interventions for assisting children with developmental issues, such as video modelling, can be utilised in a way that is both functional and motivating.

This talk will give a brief synopsis of the way we are using drama groups and methods to better target social reasoning and social skills in ways that conventional social skills groups miss or may struggle with. This will include examples of outcomes, lessons learned and future directions being explored such as measurement methods and integration of other therapies. Lastly, I will attempt to show how therapists can use novel and unconventional methods such as drama in a way that is both evidence based and consistent with the latest research on development and learning.

*Darin Cairns is a clinical psychologist with over 15 years' experience in treating children, adults and families for a range of psychological disorders. He specialises in emotional, neurological and developmental disorders, and has expertise in child, adolescent, family therapy and developmental disorders such as autism spectrum disorders. Darin has set up award winning early intervention services in Western Australia for children with ASD and related conditions, and has lectured at tertiary level, providing over 150 training courses to a wide range of populations in the medical, health and public settings.*



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## **Break-out Sessions 10.15am Saturday 5th November**

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### **Inclusive Schooling: If It's So Good, Why Is It So Hard to Sell? - Dr John O'Rourke**

What does the take-up of new technology have in common with the adoption of inclusive pedagogies to support students with additional needs in regular classrooms? Both are profound changes in the way we do things. Both are in response to changes in society. Both are championed by true believers and villainised by those more resistant to change. In this presentation, Dr O'Rourke considers why inclusive education has been so difficult to sell within schools, despite empirical evidence that is highly supportive of this practice. He also reviews meta-analyses on academic outcomes of students with disability in inclusive and segregated environments, and will discuss why the apparent benefits of this approach are not universally appreciated by Australian classroom teachers.

### **Sexuality – Dr Emma Goodall**

Young people and adults explore their sexual identity as they grow older but it can be much more complicated for those of us on the spectrum. Dr Goodall will introduce a range of issues and possible strategies for enabling autistics to develop a healthy attitude and understanding of sexuality and relationships. A key area of this is personal safety and avoidance of abusive relationships of all types. This presentation will look at how to identify and safely leave unhealthy relationships, as well as steps to help identify what an individual needs and wants within a friendship or workplace relationship.

### **Understanding Problem Behaviour: An Introduction – Regina Ledo**

Parents, therapists and educators often require support in managing challenging behaviour in individuals on the Autism Spectrum. Conversations around these behaviours often focus on the *form* of the disruptive behaviours (e.g., “he hits”, or “She is naughty”). However, the *function* of the behaviour is just as important. In this presentation, Regina will provide an overview of the four main functions of problem behaviour, and how to determine what the function of behaviour might be. She will also present several practical strategies that have been shown to be effective for individuals at all age levels. This presentation is suitable for both parents and professionals. At the conclusion, participants will have foundation knowledge of the four main functions of behavior and beginning strategies for promoting positive behavior.

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## **Plenary Sessions 11.45am Saturday 5th November**

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### **Choosing the right therapy: promises, pitfalls and proof- Professor Andrew Whitehouse**

One of the first and most important choices parents make after a child's diagnosis of autism is which therapy will be most suitable for their child. Unfortunately, this is also one of the most difficult choices. Professor Andrew Whitehouse will lay out a set of principles that will help guide families to make a choice of therapy that is best for their child.



*Professor Andrew Whitehouse, a former Fellow at the University of Oxford, directs the Autism Research Centre at the Telethon Kids Institute, University of Western Australia, and is one of their youngest ever professors. His research team uses a range of methodologies to investigate the early identification and intervention of children with Autism Spectrum Conditions, including molecular genetics, neuroscience, endocrinology and behavioural experiments. He is also a Program Director in the Autism Cooperative Research Centre, a published author and an advisor to State and Commonwealth Governments on policies relating to children and adults with Autism Spectrum Conditions.*

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**Closing 12.15pm Saturday 5th November**

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### **We're All In This Together – A National Approach to Autism – Judy Brewer**

For many years the autism community in Australia has been characterised by small and large groups working semi-autonomously and often in competition for the limited resources and public profile on offer. By its very nature, autism creates divergent opinions and ways of achieving outcomes, but this should not stop us from maximising our power to make changes on a national scale and work towards better and tangible outcomes that flow to all our families wherever they live in our vast country. The emergence of the NDIS, the success of the national Co-operative Research Centre for Autism (Autism CRC) and the newly created Australian Autism Alliance are all critical steps in seeing a more coherent national voice for autism come to reality. Western Australia has long been a leader in autism innovation, research and service delivery and therefore it is vital that WA be fully engaged, ready to inform and willing to play a key role this newly strengthened national approach.

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