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ABIQ NEWS

March 2008

Autism Behavioural Intervention Queensland (ABIQ) was formed to enhance the treatment of children with autism. It is the belief of ABIQ that children with autism are best treated by Applied Behavioural Analysis. This therapy gives children with autism a chance – a chance to grow, to live and to lead a fulfilling and independent life.

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Have you registered yet?



The ARMS Global Autism Conference

29 & 30 August 2008

Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre
South Bank

Full program and online registration
Available at www.abiq.org

Featuring
Professor Tony Attwood
Carol Gray
Brenda Smith Myles
Bobby Newman
Wendy Lawson
Woody McGinnis
and many other speakers....

Contact the ABIQ office for more information.

President's Column

The members of the ABIQ management committee are a versatile bunch. We are good at multi-tasking and putting our hands up when a job needs to be done. During the last few months, there have been more opportunities than usual to test this versatility. Even this very column is being delivered to you in the words of the ABIQ Secretary (and not the President), proving once again that we can swap roles at a moment's notice when required! Our President, Belinda Harris, works full-time in the banking industry and is up to her ears in work due to the end of the financial year. Good luck Belinda!

The ABIQ treasurer, Kellie Postle, whom many of you know as the voice on the telephone and the person delivering your emails from the ABIQ office, surprised us all recently with the news that she is expecting a new addition to her family. Congratulations to Kellie, Troy, Adam and Alyssa on this wonderful news! Unfortunately, Kellie has not been feeling too great due to morning (noon and night) sickness, so has been absent from the ABIQ office. We would like to thank Sharon Horan for standing in at very short notice while Kellie takes a rest, especially given that the office is so busy at present with registrations and preparations for the upcoming autism conference. We hope Kellie is feeling well enough soon to return to her role. Please forgive us if we take a little longer than usual to respond to your emails and phone messages at the office.

Our Vice-President, Bianca Joe Kong, who works full-time as a child safety officer, also had good news to share recently. She too is expecting a new baby so our congratulations also go to Bianca, Gary, Mia and Zoe. We wish you all the best for health and happiness.

Although Michael Chan no longer sits on the management committee, he has maintained his involvement in so many aspects of ABIQ's work. Michael is convening The ARMS Global Autism Conference, a role which he has taken on with his usual level of skill and dedication. It is a huge task, especially as he fits this in around his full-time job as Chief Safety Engineer for Workplace Health and Safety Queensland.

And then there is me, Kylie, ABIQ Secretary. I used to spend rather a lot of my working life in the ABIQ office, coordinating our education events, support groups, communications and resources. For the last 11 weeks, I have been working in my new job at the Queensland Studies Authority, which has effectively reduced the time I am able to spend at the ABIQ office. You may still catch me there one day a week but even that has been a bit of a challenge to keep up recently!

We are all parents of a child with autism. The time we give to running ABIQ is additional to the demands of our professional working lives and raising a family.

We are ably supported by our fifth committee member, Maureen Brand, who works full-time in the childcare sector at the inclusion support agency. Maureen travels to our meetings from Maroochydore and is well known for her enthusiasm and energy in the disability/ autism community on the Sunshine Coast.

So as you can see, life is busy, and certainly never dull!! Our association with ABIQ has come about because we have drawn support, advice and help from the organization at some point in our lives and we consider it is incredibly important to continue that model for new parents who are travelling the same road we have travelled.

In September, ABIQ will be holding its Annual General Meeting. It would be reassuring to think that some of our established (or even our newer) members would like to play a part in the future of ABIQ. There will be vacancies on the committee and the opportunity to bring fresh ideas to the organization. The more people we have on board to share the running of ABIQ, the more the load is lightened for each committee member.

There is a lot of personal satisfaction and reward to be gained from being part of the ABIQ committee. During my eight year association, I have greatly increased my knowledge about autism, met some wonderful families, made lasting friendships and acquired a whole array of new skills. In my mind, I

have always tagged ABIQ affectionately as 'the little organization with the big heart'. I believe our capacity is unlimited to help each other as parents of children with autism. ABIQ provides that vehicle for giving and receiving support. Please think about joining the committee to help continue achieving this important goal.

For now though, it is full speed ahead to The ARMS Global Autism Conference which will take place on August 29 and 30 at the Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre. This conference will be our biggest yet and features a great line-up of international presenters. Registrations are going well and it is great to see that so many of our members have taken advantage of the membership and early bird discounts. There are still places available if you have not yet registered. The conference is a fantastic opportunity to hear new ideas and network with parents and professionals who share an interest in autism. Please visit the ABIQ website for full details of the conference program and to register online. I look forward to seeing many of you at the conference and catching up!!

Kylie Graham

ABIQ Secretary

Autism gets \$190m boost

PARENTS of autistic preschoolers will receive up to \$12,000 over two years to help pay for early intervention programs.

The assistance is part of the Federal Government's \$190 million election commitment to helping children with autism, which was outlined today. The package, which includes a rebate of \$6000 a year to fund early intervention programs, will be available to parents of children aged under six for the two years prior to school.

Up to 3000 families would be eligible for the rebate this year, parliamentary secretary for disabilities Bill Shorten said. "Some of the behavioural therapies are very expensive ... but at an early intervention centre, where you've got service providers, we are optimistic that this will go a substantial way."

Mr Shorten said the package was "a re-configuration" of the previous Howard Government's election commitment to autism, which was matched by Labor during last year's campaign. "The Howard Government was proposing a lot less into early intervention ... this is principally an early intervention package," Mr Shorten said.

"Early intervention makes a quantum difference in the quality of life for a child with autism."

Under the package, children up to the age of 12 will be eligible for Medicare rebates for diagnosis and 20 visits to allied health professionals. There is also funding for development courses for 450 teachers to support students with autism and the appointment of 40 autism advisers Australia wide.

Families in rural and remote areas will also be eligible for an additional \$2000 to help access services. The Government says this part of the package will help 9000 families.

Autism is a neurological disability with no known cause and affects an estimated one in every 160 children.

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/>

June 25, 2008

Early detection is vital in autism

Andrew Trounson | *July 02, 2008*

"IT is awful." For La Trobe University psychologist Cheryl Dissanayake, there is no other way to describe the experience of telling young parents their toddler has autism.

But after an exhausting study in which she and her team have trained maternal health nurses to spot babies with signs of autism, she is finding she can identify the disorder at just 12 to 18 months rather than at three or four years old, as is more common.

Being able to intervene early with behavioural treatment vastly improves the chances of minimising the effects. And now Dr Dissanayake has \$2 million in research funding to expand her study into genetics and hormones to understand the causes of autism, which covers a complex spectrum of disorders such as Asperger's syndrome, and pervasive developmental disorder.

One in 167 children in Australia suffers from some form of autism, with males four times likelier than females to be affected.

"You are giving the parents a life sentence, but I approach that now with a fair amount of optimism because the outcomes for the children and the family will be much better," said Dr Dissanayake, of La Trobe's school of psychological science.

In a dream come true for a researcher with a cause, Dr Dissanayake last week discovered she was getting double the research money she expected to establish the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre at La Trobe University.

Named after chief benefactor Olga Tennison, whose family had first-hand experience with autism, the centre initially was being established on a \$500,000 gift from Mrs Tennison, with La Trobe providing a further \$500,000. But at the launch last week Mrs Tennison, widow of journalist Patrick Tennison, doubled the size of her gift, which was then matched by the university.

"If they can just get them early they can do a lot for them ... but my ultimate aim is to try (to) find out what is happening," she said.

Last week the federal Government allocated \$190 million over four years to providing up to \$12,000 worth of early intervention support for children aged six and younger diagnosed with autism. The Government was also offering Medicare rebates and plans to establish 150 playgroups for children with autism.

Autistic children tended to display a lack of social interaction and engagement with their environments.

"It is like they are living within themselves," Mrs Tennison said.

The key to minimising the effects as the child grew was to tailor interaction to stimulate more normal brain development by adjusting the environment to stimulate neurological responses and to activate or switch off genes.

Researchers such as Cambridge University's Simon Baron-Cohen, cousin of comedian Sacha Baron-Cohen, have speculated that autism may be an exaggeration or extreme manifestation of normal male brain development.

"We know from the way the brain develops and from genetics that you can alter outcomes for the child and minimise the effects of the disorder," Dr Dissanayake said.

Essential to that was starting treatment as early as possible because young brains were more plastic.

Early intervention could make the difference between a child being able to speak or growing up almost mute.

Early treatment also helped by reducing the constant frustration that an autistic child felt at not being able to communicate.

It was this frustration, a so-called secondary manifestation of the disorder, that was partly the cause of the antisocial tantrums, sulking and tendencies toward self-harm.

Working with PhD student Josephine Barbaro, in 2006, Dr Dissanayake trained 241 maternal health nurses across 17 local areas in Victoria to identify autism in children at 12 to 18 months.

Of the 110 children referred to her, 80 per cent were shown to display autism, with the rest shown to be suffering from some lesser learning disorder. In a sign of the success of the training, only one child referred to Dr Dissanayake proved to be completely normal, if a little shy.

The study, funded by the Telstra Foundation, would be completed in October, but Dr Dissanayake said she was pushing state and federal governments to roll out such a learning program nationally.

New ABIQ Library Resources

The following materials have recently been purchased for the ABIQ reference collection, which is housed at the ABIQ Office, Strathpine. A full list of available materials is located on the members page of the ABIQ website. Current financial members are welcome to borrow materials from this collection or to suggest future purchases.

Title	Author	Description
A Thorn in My Pocket	Eustacia Cutler	Temple Grandin's mother tells the family story
Choosing Home: Deciding to Homeschool with Asperger Syndrome	Martha Kennedy Hartnett	Offers hope and encouragement to parents interested in home schooling a child with Asperger Syndrome
Wishing on the Midnight Star	Nancy Ogaz	Hilarious adventure story featuring Nic who has autism and his brother Alex.
Home Educating Our Austistic Spectrum Children	Terri Dowty & Kitt Cowlshaw (Editors)	School can be a nightmare for children on the autism spectrum. Home education can provide a positive and workable alternative.
Through the Eyes of Aliens	Jasmine Lee O'Neill	Jasmine Lee O'Neill is autistic and proud of it. The author draws us into her inner world and explains the threatening and confusing nature of the outside world for a young autistic child.
A Self-Determined Future With Asperger Syndrome	E. Veronica Bliss & Genevieve Edmonds	Presents an empowering practical approach to helping people with AS to succeed at college, at work, at home and in life.
Mental Health Aspects of Autism and Asperger Syndrome	Mohammad Ghaziuddin	Alerts parents and professionals to the occurrence of common emotional and psychological problems in autism.

Parent Perspective

The Experience of Crossing Over

Deciding on a school placement is one of the harder decisions faced by parents, but when you are the parent of a child with special needs, the difficulty factor increases dramatically.

Recently, my son made a move to special school after spending six years in a highly supported placement at our local mainstream school. With a great deal of soul-searching and uncertainty, we have “crossed over” and as a parent, I am just beginning to reflect on the implications of my decision.

My son’s move to special school was a response to staff and attitude changes at our previous school, rather than a carefully planned choice. Suffice to say, we had been relying upon a partnership with school staff based on open communication, shared goals and mutual respect which stalled when a key staff member departed and was subsequently replaced.

In addition to the loss of this partnership, there were also some health issues that were having a significant impact on my child – debilitating anxiety and the onset of neurological symptoms made staying in the mainstream a more difficult proposition.

With these factors weighing heavily on my mind, it seemed inevitable to consider a change of school placement. I had not thought it worthwhile visiting other primary schools, as my son is turning 12 this year and has high needs, but I arranged visits to two special schools in my area which cater for students up to age 18.

Honestly, I was not expecting to be impressed but the second special school I visited seemed to have a number of positive factors:

- An intelligent and sensitive principal who took the time to answer my questions, and signaled from the outset that a partnership approach would be welcomed
- Caring, friendly staff
- Small classes (usually 6 students per group)
- A flexible environment and range of programs
- A school climate of tolerance and acceptance
- A number of higher functioning students who might act as appropriate role models

After further visits, some “official” telephone calls and more soul-searching, I proceeded to enrol my son at special school.

My feelings at that time were very mixed. For seven years, I had resisted the special school system, believing its exclusionary practices and limited curriculum had little to offer my child. Would moving to special school now erode achievements previously made in mainstream school? Would the people around my child now treat him as though he had less intelligence? Would they have low expectations of him, causing him to perform below his potential? Would anyone believe in him and persist in trying to teach him new things? Would he develop more problem behaviours in this setting?

Above all though, I had a deep feeling of sadness and a fear that maybe this decision meant that I was finally “giving up” on my child.

I have to say, with some regret, that the early weeks at special school were quite difficult for my child. Change itself has the potential for causing anxiety, but there were some instances of challenging behaviour that I had not anticipated and many signs that my son was very stressed by his new environment. He communicated to me that he missed having friends, and that nobody liked him. His

tearful and angry outbursts at school spoke volumes but no one then really understood him, or the feelings he was expressing.

When my children are not happy at school, I admit I fall apart. At times the anguish was hard to manage. I began to face the afternoon pick up with grim resignation – did I really want to hear about the wet pants that were in his bag and have this used as the measure of whether his day was successful? Not really. Instead, what I longed to hear was something concrete and positive; that he had experienced joy or success with at least some element of his new program.

It worried me greatly when I saw that there was no predictable routine to start his day and no visual schedule to prepare him for what was coming ahead; these I considered to be fundamental tools in supporting children with autism. I was also concerned about the lack of opportunities for my child to access augmentative communication. Furthermore, my attempts to impress upon the class teacher that it was important to keep my son on his special diet proved largely unsuccessful – that was frustrating, given that there was such a huge focus on preparing and eating food within the weekly program.

I know from experience that these kinds of issues face children with autism in whatever educational setting their parents have chosen. Interestingly, these problems had not arisen for my son at his mainstream school but that would have a lot to do with the model of support that was delivered there – predominantly one teacher aide had been responsible for his support. That person had been able to become very familiar with his needs, which in turn had offered the desired consistency and reassurance in his daily school life. In our new school, that model was no longer available and its loss clearly had a big impact on my child.

By any measure, things were not going well. My son's unhappiness was leading us both to the inevitable conclusion that I had failed him with my decision to change schools. However, we had been through some rough patches before this point, so we had both developed a certain degree of resilience; I suppose that helped us to hang in there. I felt that a little faith was needed to allow the school to make some necessary adjustments.

A small window of hope opened quite suddenly when my son's class group experienced a temporary staff change. The tension began to ease noticeably; we all drew breath and relaxed just a little. A few theories were confirmed.

More positive news followed. A new class group was being created and my son had the opportunity to become part of it. A new teacher was appointed and after that change took place, things really started to move in the right direction.

The shift in my child's attitude to school was immediately encouraging. The previously expressed sentiment of "Get me out" had been replaced each morning by "Want school...hurry up!" He was being offered a suitable level of structure and support for his needs. The program was engaging. The teacher was responsive to the needs of students. My son was clearly feeling some degree of success and motivation – isn't that what ultimately drives us all forward in life?

I guess sometimes it takes a while to get things right when dealing with individuals! Now one semester into the year, I am starting to evaluate our experience of crossing over.

I want to say, without hesitation, that the staff members at our new school are wonderful, caring individuals who give their best to meet the needs of children with a range of disabilities. (My son's teacher always greets us with a smile and remarkably, is still smiling at the end of the day!) I have observed some innovative practices, enthusiastic responses to new ideas and plenty of happy, busy students. The school community is very fortunate to receive excellent leadership, mentoring and support from a principal with real vision. That asset should never be underestimated, by the way. For students within the school, there is a genuine sense of belonging and acceptance which I find comforting.

I have a couple of areas of concern too that are probably not unique to our new school. The first is that some teachers employed in special schools have no special education qualifications or training. Smaller classes offer flexibility and increased opportunities for individualized teaching, but effective programming will always be dependent on the expertise and motivation of teachers and the resources currently available within the school. Secondly, access to specialist staff such as Occupational Therapists or Speech Pathologists is still extremely limited, even in a special school. At the moment I feel doubtful that the goal of enabling communication for non-verbal students is currently receiving the attention it deserves.

Our experiences in both mainstream and special school have left me with the impression that ALL schools need to develop better practices to effectively cater for children with autism. A growing number of students are being identified with autism spectrum disorders so there is a clear need to ensure that all staff are confident in the use of strategies that help children with autism enhance their communication and social understanding, learn to regulate their emotions and cope with change. A basic level of skill in functional behavioural analysis together with a better understanding of how impaired sensory processing can affect behaviour would make an appreciable difference.

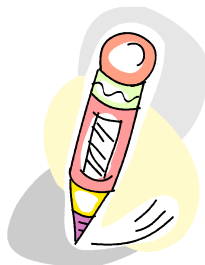
Within the provision of individualized alternative programs, there should be scope to meet the needs of all students at a special school. This is where I have decided to focus my energy, and fortunately, the partnership created at our new school is allowing me to gain some insight into my son's program. By enrolling him in this school, I believe I have a responsibility to do everything I can to make the placement work well for him.

I have an unwavering expectation that my son should be taught skills that will make a positive difference in his life. Respite is not my priority; I want an education for him. I did wonder how comfortably this expectation would fit into "special school culture" but on the whole, I have been pleasantly surprised. At our school, there seems to be shared acknowledgement of the need for meaningful educational goals, even when this inevitably presents challenges.

The concept of 'the perfect school' has never existed for me personally, but I hope and pray my son will continue to thrive in his new setting. My outlook has brightened considerably; I feel able to focus on the possibilities and actively share some of the knowledge I have gained about my child and his condition. Advocating for my son and helping to ensure his needs are met have always been part of the journey for me. Our class teacher and principal have so far accepted this willingly and responded effectively, for which I am incredibly thankful. I know many parents who have struggled in vain to be accepted as partners in their child's education.

Over the next couple of years, I envisage that I will need guidance to navigate my son's path into adolescence and then life beyond school. My teaching background has equipped me reasonably well to make contributions during the primary schooling years but moving on to the next stage is likely to take me out of my comfort zone. Any reassurance, wisdom and support that school staff can offer will be gratefully received as we head towards the future.

In crossing over, we took a leap of faith. It feels like it was the right move for us. The early years spent in the mainstream brought many benefits for my son but the special school system is now offering him some advantages that were just not available in his mainstream setting. Essentially though, I believe schools are defined best by the people that work in them. In that respect, I consider we are very fortunate to be where we are now and I am so glad we found them.

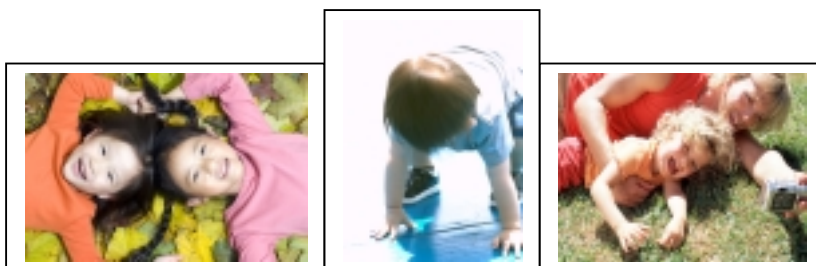


Looking for photographs of your beautiful children



If you have been to ABIQ conferences in the past, you may remember the slide shows portraying images of our very special children.

If you have some photos you would like to share with us to create the slide show for the opening of The ARMS Global Autism Conference 2008 please email them to the ABIQ office as soon as possible.
abiq1@bigpond.com



DISCLAIMER: This newsletter is intended to provide basic information on Autistic Disorder and Applied Behavioural Analysis. It is not intended to, nor does it, constitute medical or other advice. Readers are warned not to take any action with regard to medical treatment or otherwise based on the information in this newsletter without first consulting a physician. ABIQ does not necessarily endorse any of the information contained in this newsletter. The information contained in this newsletter is intended to be for your general education and information only and not for the use in pursuing any treatment or course of action. Ultimately, the course of action in treating a given patient must be individualised after a discussion with the patient's physician(s) and family.

The ARMS Global Autism Conference Program

Day 1 - Friday 29 August 2008					
9:00 am - 12 pm	Registration opens from 7:30 am. Program commences at 9:00 am. Official Opening plus keynote addresses by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carol Gray - <i>Our Contribution to the Social Impairment and Social Solution in Autism</i> • Brenda Smith-Myles - <i>The Hidden Curriculum</i> 				
Concurrent sessions for day one (29 August 2008)					
	Stream A	Stream B	Stream C	Stream D	Stream E
1:00 pm to 3:00 pm	Dr Margaret Carter and Josie Santomauro – <i>Asperger Download</i> Mandy Corkill – <i>Transition from School to Work for Students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder</i> Marilyn Patterson – <i>Transitions: Asperger Syndrome and Success in the Workplace</i>	Amanda Reed - <i>An Introduction to SoSafe!</i> Mike Pearson – <i>PocketPhrase; Communications and Executive Functioning Software for People on the Autism Spectrum</i> Dr Margaret Carter and Josie Santomauro – <i>Cool Comics Creative Ways to Promote Cognitive Thinking</i>	Brenda Smith-Myles - <i>Comprehensive Planning for Students with ASD: Integrating Interventions Throughout the Day</i>	Dr Bobby Newman - <i>Teaching Self Help Skills to Young Children</i> Carol Gray – <i>Loss, Learning and Children with ASD</i>	Moira Boyle – “ <i>Open Wide Look Inside it’s Me and My Dyspraxia</i> ”
3:30 pm to 5:30 pm	Janet Eales and Sue Park – <i>Derbyshire Language Scheme- A Structured Approach to Language Intervention</i> Jenni Machin – <i>Literal Language and Complex Concepts – Impacts on Sensory Understanding</i> Tracey Chamlin – <i>Teaching Top Level Structuring to Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder</i>	Winnie Lau - <i>Managing Feelings: Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for Individuals with Asperger’s Syndrome</i>	Carol Gray - <i>Social Stories 10.1</i>	Prue Watson - <i>Relationship Development Intervention – Creating Mindfulness</i> Brenda Smith-Myles – <i>Instruction, Interpretation, and Coaching: Keys to Social Skills Success</i>	Larry Cashion - <i>Debatable Diagnoses: How Misidentification of Developmental Disorders Affect Children with Autism</i>
Day 2 – Saturday 30 August 2008					
8:50 am - 12 pm	Keynote addresses by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wendy Lawson – <i>Helping Children with Autism to Achieve Success</i> • Professor Tony Attwood – <i>Insights into Autism</i> • Dr Woody McGinnis - <i>Oxidative Stress in Autism</i> • Dr Bobby Newman – <i>Choosing Effective Behaviour Management Strategies</i> 				
Concurrent sessions for day two (30 August 2008)					
	Stream A	Stream B	Stream C	Stream D	Stream E
1:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Professor Tony Attwood and Carol Gray – <i>New Ideas about Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome</i>	Brenda Smith-Myles – <i>The Cycle of Rage and Meltdowns</i>	Priya Cattanach - <i>Avoiding and Addressing Handwriting Hassles</i> Ren Sculthorpe – <i>Applied Behavioural Analysis Outside the Box</i> Emma Moses – <i>Strategies to Ensure a Successful Transition to School for Families with a Child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder</i>	Dr Woody McGinnis – <i>Practical Approaches to Oxidative Stress in Autism</i> Dr Richard Stuckey – <i>Pfeiffer Approach to Autism: A Part of the Puzzle</i> Judy Salmon – <i>How Diet Affects the Pathways of Behaviour, Learning and Development</i>	Dana Reinecke – <i>Change and Relationships in Adolescence</i> Kathryn Fordyce and Ana Pennington – <i>Ditching the Parents: Getting Out on Your Own</i>
3:30 pm – 5:30 pm	Professor Tony Attwood - <i>Cognitive Affective Training</i> Carol Gray – <i>Comic Strip Conversations: Reading, Comprehension and Context</i>	Dr Bobby Newman – <i>How to use Reinforcement to Improve Behaviour and Learning</i>	Wendy Lawson - <i>Interests, Obsessions and Dealing with Change</i>	Dr Jill Ashburner – <i>What can New Research tell us about the way that People with ASD Process Sensory Input</i> Priya Cattanach – <i>Promoting Play and Playfulness - A Sensory Based Therapeutic Approach to Enabling Play for Children with an ASD</i> Emma Moses – <i>Practical Strategies for Including Peer Supports in Social Communication Interventions with Children with ASD</i>	Robyn Hawkins and Beth Stanley – <i>Little Souls Taking Big Steps</i> Kirsten Aspin - <i>Teaching Children with Autism more Effectively in a Group and Classroom Setting</i>

This program may be subject to change without notice. Refer to the ABIQ website at www.abiq.org for brief details on speakers and their presentations.