



EPIC Annual Report 2010 with Statement of Accounts

EPIC CENTRE

RMIT, Plenty Road
Bundoora, Vic. 3083
Ph: 9466 9022
Fax: 9467 8442
Email: epic@rmit.edu.au
Web: www.epic.edu.au

ANNUAL REPORT 2010

WITH STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

About Us

EPIC is a not-for-profit organisation established in 1976, and is one of the major providers in Victoria of specialised early childhood intervention programs for young children with a range of developmental delays and disabilities. Approximately 115 children and families are involved in the program each year.

EPIC is a dynamic and highly regarded organisation in the provision of evidence-based early childhood intervention services. EPIC is committed to delivering innovative, high quality programs and support to children with developmental disabilities, their families and communities.

Vision

To be a leading provider of early childhood intervention support services to children with developmental disabilities and their families. To make a difference to the lives of children and their families by maximising their potential, laying the foundation for them to participate as valued members of the community throughout their lives.

Mission

To provide high quality early childhood intervention services that will

- maximise the developmental achievements of young children with disabilities
- promote and facilitate the inclusion of children with disabilities into regular preschools, schools and other settings as required
- meet the needs of families for knowledge, skills and support

- benefit the early learning and development and subsequent community inclusion and participation of children with disabilities and their families.

EPIC's mission is built on the premise that quality support that is provided as early as possible will make a significant impact on their development and later in life. Research is an indispensable component in this process.

EPIC's Services

For children and their families:

- Assessment
- Individual Program Planning
- Group Programs
- Home Environment Support
- Consultations with community service providers
- Parent information, education and support
- Research

EPIC STAFF

Chief Executive Officer	Oreste Pompetti
Program Leader/Psychologist	Nicole Mahar
Family Support Co-ordinator	Tricia Culliney
Development Co-ordinator	Sandra Sartor
Finance Officer	Morfia Pitsivoris
Administration Officer	Helen Dixon
Early Childhood Intervention Teachers	Marg Davis Samantha Jones Christine McCulloch Rozy Saric Bethwyn Turner
Speech Pathologists	Lynn Duncan Alisa Lingham Leah Simmons
Psychologist	Kate Davis
Occupational Therapist	Ashlee Doidge Carla Taitz
Physiotherapist	Laina McKenzie
My Time/Links Program	Brigid Cantwell
Stock Control Co-ordinator	Ron Manning
Opportunity Shop Co-ordinator	Gretchen Fitzgerald

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT

Chairperson	Jan Shrimpton
Deputy Chairperson	A. Prof Amanda Richdale
Treasurer	Martin Warwick
Committee Members	Oreste Pompetti Janet McCaughey Stephen Ward Jeff Walkley Diana Kish Bethwyn Turner
Auditor	Graeme F. Delany Pty Ltd

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

2010 at EPIC began in a very positive way. We appointed Oreste Pompetti as our Chief Executive Officer.

Oreste came to us with a passion for working with people and a passion for the importance of early intervention for children with disabilities and their families.

He has extensive knowledge of the importance of early intervention services from the perspective of a parent, so has much compassion and understanding for what children and families need.

He has highly developed skills in financial management, business management and is a man of the utmost integrity.

Oreste has worked hard to fulfill the role set out for him by the Board and has challenged us all to look at options that will ensure that the future of EPIC will be more easily sustained and secure.

Val Spence, who so kindly agreed to act as Chief Executive Officer until an ongoing replacement could be found did a wonderful job during 2009. Val finished her formal work with EPIC on 15th January.

Val is highly respected in the Early Years field. She worked extremely hard and took on many challenges and introduced some exciting new initiatives. We thanked her formally for all her hard work at a function earlier in the year.

A particularly exciting new initiative at EPIC is that we have established a relationship with Morang South Primary School. The 2010 pre-prep program [PrEPIC] began at the school for a group of children, the majority of whom attended EPIC. It has been very successful and all are keen for it to continue in 2011. I do thank all the staff from EPIC and Morang South who have worked to make it such a worthwhile program.

Jean Lord and Julie Carroll, our Development Officers, retired earlier in the year after many years of dedicated work for the children and families who attend EPIC. We held a most enjoyable farewell function for them on 26th February. We thanked them sincerely for all their efforts and wished them well for the future.

We also lost two other highly valued staff during the year. We thank Celina Kipka and Jane Pettifer for their many years of dedicated service to the children and families at EPIC. They were both highly valued staff members and will be greatly missed.

Our Board of Management remained reasonably stable for 2010. However, Ken Greenwood, Head of the School of Health Sciences at RMIT, decided not to continue on the Board. He has been replaced by Jeff Walkley, Head of Disabilities Services at RMIT. We thank Ken for his support for EPIC during his time with us and welcome Jeff to the Board. We also had two new parents join the Board. Sandra Sartor was with us for a short time until she was employed by EPIC. She was replaced by Diana Kish. We thank Sandra for her enthusiasm and welcome Diana to the Board. Our staff representative, Lynn Duncan, left the Board during the year and has been replaced by Bethwyn Turner. We thank Lynn for her dedicated service to both EPIC and the Board, especially her willingness to take the minutes and for the excellent job she did. It's great to have Beth back on the Board again.

EPIC has many challenges to face in the future. The Board is very much aware of how difficult it is for small organisations to stand alone at a time when fund-raising is becoming increasingly difficult. During the year we have been actively pursuing the possibilities of merging with a larger organisation. All discussions are very much in the preliminary stages. Our concern, if we proceed with a merger, is that programs for children and families will continue at the high level that everyone expects and that conditions for staff will be maintained and even improved.

Finally, I do want to thank the dedicated staff at EPIC, because without them there would be no EPIC. This time of potential change is very difficult for them, but has not impacted in any way on the outstanding way they work with children and families. We have made one important new staff change during the year – the appointment of a Program Leader. Nicole Mahar has taken on this role. She is highly respected by all staff and parents and is already doing a wonderful job.

Like you all, I absolutely believe in the worth of this organisation and know that if we all work together, it will have a bright and exciting future.



Jan Shrimpton
Chairperson

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

I would like to acknowledge all the children and families of EPIC who are navigating through what may seem like uncharted territory at times, as they apply themselves to do the very best they can for their children. The challenges that come your way, the circumstances that present themselves and the many voices that seem to be speaking and vying for your attention, can be a very overwhelming experience. At EPIC, our reason for being is to support you in your journey.

At EPIC, our focus is to support children and families during the pre-school age years, with early intervention services that seek to lighten the load for families. We have a very committed program team at EPIC comprising Early Childhood Intervention Teachers, Speech Pathologists, Occupational Therapists, Psychologists and a Physiotherapist. As a team, they work with our children and families in group settings at the EPIC Centre and out in the community in places such as Kinder and Child Care and also in the family home. Each family has a key worker from this team, who operates as a family facilitator, to support them through the early intervention stage for their child. I would like to sincerely thank all the program staff for their effort and commitment during the year in providing this much needed support and assistance to our children and families. Of

course, I must also mention the important work of EPIC support staff working in Administration, Finance, Opportunity Shops and Fundraising. The work done by staff in these areas, enables the program staff to directly support our children and families.

I would also like to thank Tricia Culliney for her support to me in my role, when I commenced earlier this year. Her wealth of experience and knowledge of EPIC from a leadership perspective, was of great value in assisting me to settle into my role. Tricia has also provided valued support to parents involved in the MyTime program, in her role as Family Support Co-ordinator. I would also like to thank our Program Leader Nicole Mahar, who has also been a great support to me in my role as CEO. This is a new role that Nicole has worked in for the past three months, where she exercises supervision over all aspects of the EPIC Program. She has settled very well into this role and has been doing an outstanding job in the process.

During my time as CEO, we have had to say goodbye to a number of staff that have moved on from EPIC. We honoured them with farewell gatherings during the year and I wish to express thanks for the service they provided as

employees of EPIC. Thankyou to Julie Carroll, Jean Lord, Celina Kipka and Jane Pettifer. As a result of these staff movements, we were delighted to welcome new members into our EPIC team; Sandra Sartor, Alisa Lingham, Ashlee Doidge and Kate Davis.

A key part of the work I have applied myself to as CEO, has flowed on from my recommendation to the Board, that EPIC explore the possibility of a merger with a larger organisation. It is paramount that EPIC be positioned to continue to provide high quality, innovative and evidence based services to children and families. Such positioning needs to support growth and enhancement of the services we provide our families. A proactively managed merger can offer significant benefits for our children, families, staff and community. In an environment where funding is tight, there is a need to better use the resources we have at our disposal, within the support and infrastructure of a larger organisation. As we move into a future where funding will be tied to quality benchmarks in service delivery, the need to apply review and improvement processes will be critical to retain Government funding. Larger organisations typically employ such quality review processes as routine practice.

I am very delighted that Government funding has increased for the 2010-11 financial year and will increase again for the following year. ECIA, with the support of the early intervention sector, lobbied admirably and were a significant reason this funding increase came through. These additional finances will take a lot of pressure off the fundraising dependence EPIC has been exposed to over the years. The funding increase has been very timely and together with the potential for a well-considered merger in the near future, EPIC can be positioned to continue to deliver quality, responsive and valuable services for the benefit of our amazing children and their families.

Oreste Pompetti
Chief Executive Officer

PROGRAM LEADER'S REPORT

Information about group programs

This year has been a very exciting year for the EPIC program. We have seen the establishment of innovative and exciting new programs, and the continuation of providing quality ongoing short term groups and outreach support to facilitate inclusion for all our children in their various community settings.

EPIC has provided a large variety of ongoing and short term groups designed to assist children in specific developmental areas. Many EPIC children in the 4 to 6 year old range have participated in 'Cool Cats' and 'The Buddy Club'. These programs are designed to assist children in developing emotional literacy skills; calming and problem solving abilities, which can then be built upon to further social skills in peer settings such as kindergarten and school. Buddy Club and Cool Cats (and the research associated with these programs), were presented at the Early Childhood Intervention Australia Conference in Canberra earlier this year, and received great professional interest and a number of enquiries. Next year, our partnership with RMIT University Psychology Department will see us embark on projects to further evaluate these programs and develop manuals to share these programs with others in our industry.

Additionally, this year our staff have provided several groups specifically aimed at addressing

the sensory processing needs of children, through the 'Move, groove and soothe' program. This program focused on the development and promotion of children attending to tasks; improving body awareness; reduction of sensory reactions (either "withdrawal" or inability to "calm down" reactions to certain situations); and improved motor planning and co-ordination. We look forward to expanding this program and offering it to more families next year.

EPIC's collaborative relationship with Morang South Primary School continues to grow and evolve. This year has been the inaugural year for the PrEPIC program. PrEPIC has provided an intensive transition year for children of school age. The program has been delivered by EPIC teachers and Morang South integration aide staff, resulting in a seamless and mutually beneficial partnership. The program has followed a school curriculum, with accommodations made to support the children's sensory, cognitive, social and emotional developmental needs. It is without doubt, that all the children who have participated in the program have benefited from the intensive and supported environment, and we have seen significant improvements in the children's ability to participate in school activities, and obtain foundational learning skills. We would like to extend a thank you to all the families that have participated this year- it is always with some trepidation that one begins a 'pilot' program. However, the commitment and joy of PrEPIC

families in seeing their children embrace day to day school life, and the Morang South school community embrace their children, has been unequivocal. We wish all our PrEPIC families well as they now embark on the rest of their primary school years, wherever that may be; specialist or mainstream settings.

Finally our ties with Morang South have been cemented by the continuation of 'Ready, Set, Prep'. This is a term long school readiness program, delivered in Morang South classrooms. This year, two 'Ready, Set, Prep' groups were offered, and we continue to see this program as a key ingredient in providing many of our children with effective school transition support.

Home and community support

EPIC endeavours to provide exemplary support for families in their home and community settings, and tailoring support to suit individual family's needs. Children attending kindergarten, child care or family day care are offered support for their successful inclusion in their respective programs. EPIC staff promote inclusion via providing child care and kindergarten staff with materials, information and hands on demonstration to assist them in helping all children participate in their respective programs. Strategies include visual schedules, lanyards, use of finish boxes, wait cards and social stories to provide children with understanding about what is expected of them in various settings,

promote positive ways for children to behave and learn in these settings. Of key importance in facilitating inclusion for all our children in child care and kindergarten environments, is assisting child care workers and kindergarten teachers with guidance and necessary reports/resources to apply for funding for additional assistance.

Sharing skills and strategies that children learn at EPIC with the wider community, and providing professional development for early childhood staff is an area where EPIC continues to seek to improve and evolve. This year EPIC offered workshops and professional development sessions on the use of visual aids to support children's learning, and strategies used in the Cool Kids and Buddy Club programs to promote social and emotional functioning. These sessions were conducted at the EPIC centre and in various kindergarten and childcare settings. Feedback from participants of these sessions indicated participants felt the resources and information provided was valuable not only in terms of providing support for their roles in assisting children with additional needs, but in assisting staff to appropriately support all children in their care.

Other topics of interest

EPIC is at the forefront of developing professional resources for early childhood intervention in Victoria, and contributing to the evidence base for effective practice in assisting

children with developmental concerns, primarily through our research partnerships with RMIT.

This year we have seen EPIC provide training in our 'Early G.O.A..L.S' family well being program to over 70 early childhood intervention professionals in regional Victoria, building on training offered to practitioners in metropolitan Melbourne over the previous two years. Our partnership with RMIT University under the leadership of Associate Professor Susana Gavidia Payne has seen us participate in a second round of data collection for the Child and Family Outcomes Project, examining possible relationships between families' perceptions of early childhood intervention, family well being and child development. Summaries of results will be made available to our families and the EPIC community later this year, and will assist us in future program planning and service delivery.

Nicole Mahar
Program Leader

FAMILY SUPPORT CO-ORDINATOR REPORT

EPIC has had two contracted programs running this year, PlayConnect and MyTime.

PlayConnect is a federally funded playgroup available to families who have a child with autism or autistic like behaviours. MyTime is also federally funded and provides peer support to parents or carers of a child with a disability or chronic illness. Child minding is available to parents who are involved in MyTime.

PlayConnect

The PlayConnect group based at EPIC has had limited success in terms of family participation and attendance rates. On the basis of this, we will not be reapplying for PlayConnect funding in 2011. Due to the limited uptake on this playgroup, it has been decided to allow another organisation to host this program, in the hope that they will have families who take full advantage of the support available through this group. I must say that Brigid Cantwell, the play leader who runs this program, has done an exceptional job in dealing with a very demanding and complex work environment. She has been a great asset to the program.

MyTime

MyTime has gone from strength to strength this year, with increased family participation, support provided to families from different cultural

backgrounds, and a network of community support evolving from and beyond individual groups.

The organisation behind the MyTime program has undertaken some major changes which have come with the new agreement between EPIC and the Parenting Research Centre.

EPIC is now a MyTime Coalition Lead Agency and with this comes extra funding as well as extra responsibilities for the Coalition Coordinator, being me. We have ten MyTime groups in our coalition. These are our three, Monday and Tuesday groups at EPIC, the Wednesday group at Morang South Primary School, as well as groups in Greensborough, Mill Park, Sunbury, Broadmeadows and three groups run by the Queen Elizabeth Centre in Noble Park, San Remo and Morwell.

Quite a spread of groups and at each meeting, families have an opportunity to meet others in the same situation, and provide that all powerful peer support.

Our three groups provide a regular meeting of people who have become firm friends and who genuinely care about each other. It is lovely to catch up with people that you feel connected to,

people that you care about and people that you share experiences with.

At MyTime, we aim to increase people's sense of connection, provide information when needed and to work toward having the resources to live a full, rich and rewarding life.

High ideals I know and I think we are providing this most of the time.

Tricia Culliney
Family Support Co-ordinator

Development Co-ordinator Report

Volunteers

EPIC recognises that volunteers are an integral part of the organisation and values their contribution. Our Opportunity Shop volunteers allow EPIC to extend and enrich the delivery of services.

EPIC provides Opportunity Shop volunteers with work that is safe, significant, fulfilling and appreciated. Volunteers work as members of a team and are treated with dignity and respect. EPIC understands the importance volunteers currently play in the organisation and looks forward as to how volunteers might be used in future. In 2009/2010, there were 60 volunteers regularly working within our four Opportunity Shops. We sincerely thank them for their continued support and commitment. We are also hugely grateful to both Gretchen Fitzgerald (Opportunity Shop Co-ordinator) and Ron Manning (Stock Control Co-ordinator) for their efforts and endeavours in maintaining and moving the Opportunity Shops forward.

Training Event Success

In our endeavours to raise awareness of autism, Down syndrome and other developmental delays, we offer a diverse training program for parents and professionals.

Our Professor Tony Attwood Seminar was again a great success, with an overall attendance of 341 participants. The Richard Eisenmajer seminar held in October proved to be so successful, that we repeated it again in February. Attendees' feedback at each seminar was excellent with all respondents expressing that the seminars were relevant and helpful.

A sincere thanks to parent and staff volunteers for their assistance in ensuring that training events ran smoothly on the day. We are also thankful to Helen Dixon and Morfia Pitsivoris for their collaborative efforts back at the office in providing much-appreciated administrative support.

Annual Giving

The Appeals Programs are launched in both December and May and invite supporters of the EPIC Centre to make an annual tax deductible donation. We thank all our donors for their support and encourage all of our supporters to consider contributing to the success of the EPIC Centre.

Sandra Sartor
Development Co-ordinator

Donors, Sponsors and Supporters

In 2009/2010 EPIC received donations and sponsorships from individuals, trusts and foundations, corporations and community groups. This income has allowed for the continuation of quality services to our children and their families. We would particularly like to thank:

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This is the highest award given by EPIC. Life Memberships are awarded to individuals and organisations that have made a significant contribution to EPIC and children with developmental disabilities and their families.

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