

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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Research into regional autism services

Researchers are looking at the impacts of early intervention strategies for children with autism in North West Tasmania.

The research will be carried out by the University of Tasmania in partnership with the North West Tasmania Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre (ASELCC), a federally funded centre run by Burnie City Council.

The North West Tasmania ASELCC centre was opened in 2010 and currently supports close to 50 children with autism and autism like symptoms.

The study will be carried out by researchers and students from the Rural Clinical School in Burnie, and will be looking at the effectiveness of the programs provided by the centre over the four years since it opened.

Project Leader and Lecturer in Clinical Psychology at the Rural Clinical School, Miranda Stephens said the research will focus on the effectiveness of therapeutic programs used at the centre, the success of the regional hub model, and the impact of the centre on social inclusion for families with children who have utilised the services provided by the Burnie ASELCC.

“The Rural Clinical School is focussed on researching and supporting health outcomes and service delivery in the North West, so this is a natural, relevant and exciting partnership between two unique organisations,” Ms Stephens said.

ASELCC Manager Kathryn Fordyce said Burnie is the only regional location in Australia to house an Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre.

“Burnie is in a unique position to have this level of service for children with autism, and to be able to provide satellite services to surrounding North West regions,” Ms Fordyce said.

“The research outcomes from the Burnie ASELCC will provide guidelines for implementing future early intervention programs for children with autism in rural communities throughout Australia.”

Ms Fordyce said that current funding for the six ASELCC centres around Australia will continue until June 2015 and that all the ASELCCs nationally are awaiting advice from the Australian Government about funding beyond this time.

“We need to clearly establish the impact of the centre on individuals with autism and their families,” she said.

“The research results will tell us how effective the ASELCC model has been for rural children and families and will play a critically role in informing the future of the North West Tasmanian Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre.”

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