



What is Autism?

Autism is a brain disorder that affects approximately 1 in 150 children to varying degrees along the “spectrum”. Typical characteristics of autism include difficulties with communication and social interaction, confusion in understanding what is happening around them, obsessive and ritualistic behaviour such as lining up or spinning objects. Autistic individuals frequently have dramatically heightened senses of touch, hearing and smell. Self-abuse (hitting, scratching, head-butting etc) and destructive behaviour are common. Many people with autism have additional conditions such as intellectual delay, brain seizures, pica behaviour and epilepsy.

People on the autism spectrum are all different. They tend to be good at static processing of data. In extreme cases of “savant” behaviour they can memorise and reproduce extraordinary amounts of information. However, communicating and interacting with other people requires dynamic thinking. This is invariably difficult but not impossible for people with autism. Currently, very few adults with autism have meaningful jobs or have friendships or relationships outside of their immediate family.

There is no known “cure” for autism but early diagnosis and appropriate intervention maximize the child’s chance of achieving his or her potential and enjoying a good quality of life.

What is Giant Steps?

The Giant Steps approach involves a combination of special education and therapy applied in a coordinated, transdisciplinary way to address the entire set of needs of the child. The disciplines operating within the school include speech therapy, music therapy and occupational therapy as well as special education.

Every child has an Individual Education Plan that is agreed between the parents and the team of staff working with the student. To enable each child to follow a program that caters for his or her specific needs Giant Steps has almost as many staff as students. This makes the school relatively expensive to operate but it makes a big difference to the progress of the child.

The schoolwork involves education in traditional subjects - reading, writing and arithmetic, science, geography, sport etc - but they are provided in a way that is practical and meaningful to the students.

Participation in the community is an important element of the Giant Steps program. Many of the students are “integrated” into mainstream schools for part of their week. All of the students in the Secondary Program spend part of their week employed at work experience.

Parent training is also a key element of the Giant Steps model. It is important for parents to understand the techniques used to help their children learn and communicate so that what is done at the school carries over into the home.

Giant Steps was the first school in Australia for children with autism to use a holistic approach in which therapy services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy and music therapy were incorporated in a comprehensive way into the educational program. A number of other schools have since adopted this approach.

One of the keys to Giant Steps’ success has been excellent leadership and quality people. Staff retention has been above 95% for the past three years. Giant Steps was the first special school in Australia to introduce competency based compensation. Traditionally, schools pay teachers salaries that vary only with their number of years of experience. All of our employees have been on contracts since 1999 and since 2007 salary scales based on competency not years of experience. Every employee undertakes at least 40 hours of useful training each year and elevation to a higher salary level is based on how well they teach not just on how much they know or how long they have been around.

In 2009 Giant Steps opened its Community College. This is a day program for young adults. This is the only such program in NSW that caters exclusively for post school aged people with autism. From a standing start it has been a tremendous success and is now in its fourth year.

The support of donors and corporate sponsors has made this possible. We want to continue to operate, grow and improve our services and ask you to extend your financial support to allow us to do so.

Financial Needs

Giant Steps is a charity that runs a school and other services for children with autism. It opened in 1995 with 12 students. There are now over 60 students in the school and 7 young adults in the post-school Community College. It will cost \$5.7 million to operate the programs in 2012. Of this the NSW and Australian governments will provide around \$2.8 million. No school fees are charged so we need to raise \$2.9 million for the programs to operate. This money comes from donations from individuals and corporations and a series of fund-raising events organised by parents and friends. The events include a Ball for 1,000 people, a bike ride, golf day, sailing regatta and a walk.

Our expected sources of non-government funds are:

Donations from families	800,000
Fund-raising events	1,100,000
Expected Corporate donors	350,000
Community donations	400,000
Task	250,000
	2,900,000

Your help in covering the task will make a huge difference to the lives of our children and their families.

All donations are tax deductible.

All money donated to Giant Steps is used to provide direct services for our children. Fund-raising is organised by parent volunteers with assistance from one paid employee in administration. Over 90% of costs are for salaries, training and teaching resources.

For more information on Giant Steps visit www.giantsteps.net.au