

# Solve!

## At the RCH



**Murdoch Childrens  
Research Institute**

*Healthier Kids. Healthier Future.*

Welcome to the first newsletter of *Solve! At the RCH*. There is much to report since the launch by Sir Gus Nossal on the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2006.



The Dress Revival was a wonderful fund-raising event held at the Villa Alba Museum in Kew on 10th September 2006. The organisation of the day was carried out impeccably by Katie O'Callaghan, who assembled a committed team that included members of the Trailblazers and Waverley Auxiliaries, along with staff from the RCH Foundation. Donated gowns from celebrities were a highlight but there were also many thousands of items that were bought at reasonable cost by those who attended on the day. There were evening gowns, after five wear, hats and bags along with bridal dresses. The champagne breakfast, scones, jam, cream and coffee ensured sustenance to the crowd that attended. The opportunity to view the Museum was also appreciated. Our sincere thanks are due to Katie and her team – it was truly an amazing effort that raised \$28,000.

The Victorian Medical Insurance Agency has also provided extremely generous support. This group is providing 50% of the funding for the Victorian Cerebral Palsy Register which costs \$70,000 per annum to run. The Victorian Cerebral Palsy Register is an exceedingly valuable resource that enables us to study the epidemiology of cerebral palsy and to undertake studies to determine more about causes and outcomes of treatment. We were further overwhelmed by the Victorian Medical Insurance Agency's generosity in April, when they agreed to

fund the cost of a Medical Research Fellow for 2008 and 2009. The person appointed will carry out a substantial research study in addition to undertaking some clinical work.

The Banks Group Charitable Foundation kindly donated the proceeds of their Golf Day to Solve! and we thank Mr Robert Dickens for promoting Solve! to the organisers of the event. In addition, Brighton Rotary had a Walkathon and donated their proceeds to our fund raising efforts. This was much appreciated and we are grateful to Anne and Geoff McGeary who have interested the Brighton Rotary in Solve!.

We have also received grants from the Marian & E H Flack Trust and the Jack Brockhoff Foundation over the past 12 months. Their funds are enabling important research to be carried out in the area of quality of life for adolescents with cerebral palsy and poor saliva control in children with a variety of disabilities. Our team and collaborators both within and outside of the hospital are at the forefront of research in these two areas.

The Ella and Mitchell Brazier Fund, managed by ANZ Trustees, is also supporting *Solve! At the RCH* by providing a capacity building grant to enable some of the tasks of Solve! to be accomplished. This is a practical and helpful gift that is enabling us to move forward to reach our goals.

We also thank the Trailblazers, Ultimate Challenge and Waverley Auxiliaries who work tirelessly to raise funds for Developmental Medicine for the practical programs that make a significant difference to children with disabilities and their families. They also make substantial donations to our research programs. Their smiling faces and ongoing work in the hospital gift shop and at the various stalls and in the community, is an inspiration and enables so much more to be done than would be possible otherwise.

The staff in Developmental Medicine are extremely grateful to the *Solve! At the RCH* Advisory Panel, ably chaired by Bruce Bonyhady who dedicates many hours of voluntary time and valuable experience to the group, along with Bob Dickens, Katie O'Callaghan, Doris Tatman, Anne McGeary, Judy Sproats (RCH Foundation) and Anne Cronin (Murdoch Childrens Research Institute). Developmental Medicine staff members who attend the Panel are Catherine Marraffa and myself.

**Dinah Reddihough**  
Head, Developmental Medicine



**SOLVE!**  
At the RCH

# What is Solve! At the RCH

New readers may not be aware of what **Solve! At the RCH** is all about. Here is some background.

## Disability in childhood

Disability poses a significant problem for the children themselves, their parents and extended families and for society. It is a lifelong problem with a continuing need for support and special assistance. There are almost 300,000 children in the age group 0–14 years in Australia with a significant disability. Despite these large numbers and significant impact, the causes of many disabilities remain unknown and the best treatment methods uncertain.

## The Department of Developmental Medicine at The Royal Children's Hospital

Developmental Medicine (previously known as Child Development and Rehabilitation) is the department at The Royal Children's Hospital that cares for children with disabilities, particularly children with cerebral palsy, spina bifida, autism spectrum disorders, intellectual disability and multiple disabilities. There are about 5000 outpatient contacts per year as well as an inpatient service. In addition, there is an extensive teaching program. The Uncle Bobs Child Development Centre is also part of the department.

Over the past 20 years, the department has established a research program with two aims: firstly to increase knowledge about the causes of disability with the hope of developing preventive strategies, and secondly to evaluate treatment methods to ensure that the optimal interventions are provided for children and their families. As a result of this work there have been significant improvements in the way children with disabilities are treated. Additionally, there have been numerous conference and workshop presentations and 85 publications in refereed journals.

## Solve! At the RCH

In 2004, staff from Developmental Medicine decided that it was time to take the research program to the next level and create a Centre of Developmental Disability Research, because of the urgent need to increase knowledge about both the causes of disability in childhood and the outcomes of treatment. A competition was held for the children that attend our department, to find a suitable name. Ariane Garner-Williams and Jonty O'Callaghan independently came up with the name "Solve!" which was subsequently adopted.

## Mission

The mission of *Solve! At the RCH* is to improve outcomes for children with disabilities and to better understand and prevent the causes of disability. A Strategic Plan has been developed. Over the next five years, we are endeavouring to build the annual research budget to \$1.0 million per annum to:

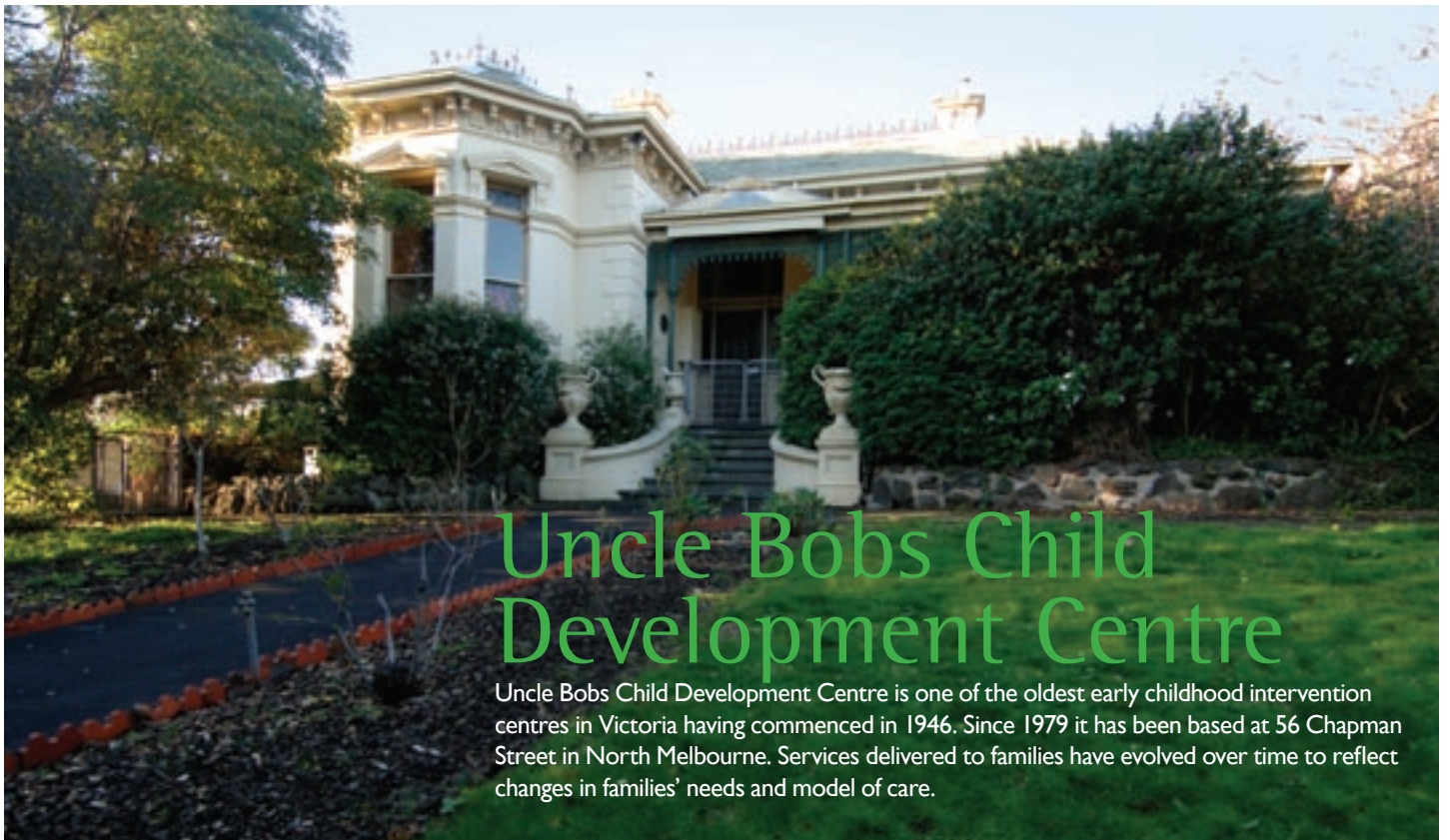
- increase the research output in childhood disability with the objective of preventing some cases, and improving outcomes for children and their families for those with established disabilities
- encourage more postgraduate students from a variety of disciplines including medicine, psychology, physiotherapy and occupational therapy to undertake research in this field
- create a Chair of Paediatric Developmental Disability, to lead the research effort ensuring sustainability into the future
- become one of Australia's leading clinically based medical research centres, specialising in developmental disability.

The current research team is quite small with the equivalent of 2.7 full time staff plus the clinical members of the department contribute some time between seeing patients and other hospital activities. Yet, there are currently 27 projects being undertaken.

In each newsletter, some of this work will be described. On this occasion, we will focus on the Uncle Bobs Child Development Centre and the work that is being undertaken in this program. Michele Spreckley, Manager of the Uncle Bobs Child Development Centre, has compiled the following report.







# Uncle Bobs Child Development Centre

Uncle Bobs Child Development Centre is one of the oldest early childhood intervention centres in Victoria having commenced in 1946. Since 1979 it has been based at 56 Chapman Street in North Melbourne. Services delivered to families have evolved over time to reflect changes in families' needs and model of care.



“In a 12 month period, programs are provided for 121 families with children with developmental needs living in the inner western region of Melbourne”.

Family centred practice is the cornerstone of our philosophy with services delivered in partnership with families that change over time and are delivered in environments where children spend most of their day, for example, kindergartens and childcare. We provide a range of services, playgroups for children under three years of age, an outreach home visiting service, kindergarten visits, groups and specific groups for children with autism. We have a partnership with Moonee Valley City Council to use some of their facilities in Keilor to provide a service in that area. We also provide support to the whole family with programs such as Family Networks (a program developed by Yooralla for parent support), an education program for parents of preschoolers with autism, the Hanen program “It takes two to talk” and sibling groups.

## More children with a diagnosis of Autism – and more research needs to be done

Uncle Bobs Child Development Centre delivers services to many families of children with autism. This has contributed to changes in the models of care at the centre. In 1990 the prevalence of autism was thought to be 4 in 10,000. Recent studies from the UK and Australia put the prevalence at between 1 in 100 to 1 in 160. These changes are mostly due to a broader definition of autism and to better recognition and earlier detection.

Uncle Bobs Child Development Centre was involved in a major research project in 2000–2003. This project looked at the effectiveness of early childhood intervention programs for children with developmental delay and their families. The project was a randomised control trial with children in the experimental group receiving an extra home visit plus their sessions at an early intervention centre while the control group received their early childhood intervention sessions alone. The results showed a significant increase in cognitive functioning for the experimental group and this was sustained one year later. These results are shortly to be published in an international journal, the Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics. The generous support of the Uncle Bobs Club, the Jack Brockhoff Foundation and the Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, who funded this work, is acknowledged.

Uncle Bobs Child Development Centre has also been involved in providing the Parent-Child Mother Goose Program. This is a Canadian program fostering mother child relationships and promoting early language development. This program is now being formally evaluated with help from students at the Australian Catholic University.



The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program

# What needs to be done now?

The help of all our supporters is much valued. Disability research is poorly supported today and to achieve our aims we need funding for:

- Small research projects, at a cost of \$10,000–\$50,000;
- Research assistants, at a cost of \$56,000–77,000, per annum;
- Research Fellowships in Developmental Medicine, at \$100,000 per annum;
- A Chair of Paediatric Developmental Disability, at \$350,000–400,000 per annum for 5 years.

Every dollar raised will make a difference to the work that we do for children with disabilities and their families.

A donation form is available in the enclosed “Solve! At the RCH” brochure”.



**SOLVE!**

At the RCH



No contribution is too small. You can be sure that for every dollar that Solve! receives:

Someone's hope will be restored

Someone's life will be changed

We will be closer to preventing disability

And ensuring the best outcomes for children with disabilities everywhere.

The **Solve! At the RCH** brochure is enclosed with this newsletter. If you would prefer to have your next newsletter by email, please forward your email address to [inge.timmerman@rch.org.au](mailto:inge.timmerman@rch.org.au)