




Speech by

Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Hansard Thursday, 12 July 2012

AEIOU FOUNDATION

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (3.31 pm): I rise to share with the House the great privilege I had in turning the first sod at the site of the AEIOU Foundation's new purpose-built early intervention centre for children with autism at the Central Queensland University in Bundaberg. AEIOU stands for the Autism Early Intervention Outcomes Unit. I was joined by the Central Queensland University Head of Campus, Phillip Clift, and AEIOU Foundation Director of Education, Diane Heaney, to officiate the ceremony, along with families set to benefit from this new purpose-built facility.

The Bundaberg Regional Council approved the development on Friday, 22 June, with construction to commence this month. I can say from firsthand experience that all stakeholders are excited about what the new complex promises to bring which is a full service to more local families. It is planned to open in term 1 of 2013. Until then, families will continue to be supported at the AEIOU's temporary early intervention program centre operating out of the ABC Early Learning Centre in Bundaberg. The centre's location will create opportunities for research collaboration between AEIOU and the Central Queensland University, along with work experience placements for students studying education.

It was an important moment to turn the first sod for this important development. Autism is not rare. Families in the Burnett region have been calling for a service like this where their children can receive full-time education, therapy and child-care support. This program helps children learn vital life skills, like the ability to communicate their needs, their wants and their feelings, and to understand and engage with the environment around them.

The relationship between the AEIOU Foundation and the Central Queensland University presents a number of mutual benefits to the local community, with the prospect of research collaboration and work experience opportunities for students enrolled in learning management degrees, especially those focused on early childhood and primary education. As the relationship evolves, there should also be opportunities for postgraduate students and academics to participate in research projects, initially in psychology, social work and health promotion and in the longer term in areas such as music therapy, occupational therapy and allied health.

The AEIOU Foundation operates from 10 locations across Queensland. Each AEIOU centre is staffed with full-time specialist early childhood teachers, speech pathologists, occupational and music therapists as well as skilled learning facilitators. Autism is a lifelong developmental disorder. There is no cure, but best practice early intervention can make a difference to a child's development.

Autism is part of a spectrum that is often referred to as autism spectrum disorder, ASD. The word 'spectrum' is used to describe the varying degrees of autism. People with autism share three main areas of difficulty; however, the condition can affect them differently. I congratulate the AEIOU Foundation on the valuable work they do with people with autism in my community.