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Autism battle worth fighting

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WHEN Aidan Shine was two, he couldn't speak, hated being around people and was often violent.

Three years on, he is flying through his first year of primary school and has learned to overcome his challenges.

The turnaround seems miraculous to his mother, Rebecca Shine, but it happened through hard work and an amazing group of people who helped Aidan cope with his autism.

The AEIOU Foundation worked with Aidan for two years, training him to speak and control his behaviour.

He finished at the foundation's school in the middle of last year, then spent six months at kindergarten and

has just started at prep.

The teachers use a range of techniques, including "pictorial communication" and gave him cards to use requesting items.

As he progressed, he wasn't allowed to get those items without saying words.

"It was very gruelling," Ms Shine said.

"We used it at school and at home."

The results have been amazing and Aidan's parents, who were once desperately worried about their son's future, can now see he has a great chance to lead a happy life.

"He has already conquered all his learning goals for term one," Ms Shine said.

"He loves routines, so that is something that AEIOU taught him to use. They also taught him coping

mechanisms."

Ms Shine is now calling on the wider community to lend more support to the work done by AEIOU.

The nationwide foundation supports 18 children with autism at its Townsville centre, the only program of its kind in north Queensland. It delivers full-time early intervention for children with autism age two and a half to six years.

It has made a proven difference, with studies showing children who complete the program have a reduction in autism symptoms and more than 70 per cent who complete the program go on to mainstream school.

Foundation chief executive officer Alan Smith said children with autism experience challenges that most people are not aware of.

"The Shine family's experience shows us that quality,



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full-time early intervention can change the life of a young child with autism and equally as importantly, the whole family dynamic," he said.

"Everything we do at AEIOU is based on practices that have been researched and proven to work.

"To keep it that way, we operate a dedicated fundraising program which helps fund around a quarter of every child placement.

"We rely on the help of the community and the great thing about that is anybody who makes a donation can open the

door to a brighter future for the young children in our program."

Smith+Elliott principal Sally Elliott has been supporting fundraising efforts for the foundation for the past two years. "These children are so ... talented," she said.



GRUELLING TRAINING: Aidan Shine, 5, with mother Rebecca, is thriving at school, thanks to the AEIOU Foundation, which helps children with autism.

Picture: ZAK SIMMONDS