



Hobsons Bay Leader

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WILLIAMSTOWN NORTH

Shine light on the spectrum

PARENTS HAVE THEIR SAY ON AUTISM NEEDS

Fiona O'Doherty

AUSTRALIA'S biggest early intervention service for children on the autism spectrum is considering establishing a centre in the western suburbs.

Parents and carers of children on the autism spectrum are being urged to jump online and fill out a survey to help Irabina Autism Services identify pockets of need in Melbourne's suburbs.

The organisation, established almost 50 years ago, already has two centres in the outer-eastern suburbs.

Chief executive Deborah Goldfinch said the organisation helped about 400 eastern suburbs families a year.

"We understand there is a need. We are getting families using our services from across Melbourne," Ms Goldfinch said.

"The survey is to find out which of the community want us to be there and what

WHAT IT OFFERS

- Irabina Autism Services
- Diagnostic services
- Early intervention
- Training and development
- Family support
- Holiday programs
- Occupational therapy
- Dietary advice
- Social skills programs
- Play-based therapy
- Speech therapy

the demand is in each area.

"We know that growth areas, such as Wyndham, have a high birth rate and we know the benefits of early intervention.

"There is probably about 1000 people living with ASD (autism spectrum disorder) in Hobsons Bay and being close to the city is going to attract more families."

She urged parents to do the survey

"Parents are very knowledgeable. They are the best people for us to ask," she said

She praised Williamstown North Primary School's autism specific program.

School assistant principal Wendy Emim said there was always a need for more resources and funding.

"There are always resources needed to support these children," Ms Emim said.

Western Metropolitan MP Bernie Finn's son is on the spectrum and he and other parents campaigned successfully for a Western Autistic School campus to be established in Laverton.

He said Irabina had "runs on the board" when it came to providing services to families with children on the spectrum.

"It would be a very good thing if Irabina came to the west because it's been a long, hard battle to get autism services to children in the west," Mr Finn said.

Complete the survey by November 10 at irabina.com