



Autistic children receive one-on-one therapy at only child care centre of its kind on the Gold Coast

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March 14, 2017 12:00am

FOUR months ago little Kai Patch wouldn't turn around when his name was repeatedly called.

Diagnosed with autism in October last year, the two-year-old struggled to talk, make eye contact or interact.

Worried about his future, his parents, Sonya and Ben Patch, decided to move the family north from NSW to enrol at Arundel's Little Souls Taking Big Steps, one of two autistic centres on the Coast and the only one that provides a one-on-one therapy program.



Sonya Patch saw improvement with Kai's basic skills within two weeks. Picture: Richard Gosling

Ms Patch said Kai could now react to his name, showed more interest in other children, could pack his toys away and was learning important basic skills through imitation.

"We couldn't find anything like this place," Ms Patch said of the program, which can cost up to \$50,000. One-on-one therapy is based on Applied Behaviour Analysis.



Ms Patch said the combination of one-on-one therapy and the ability for their son to interact with other autistic children his own age was important to his development.

Based on best-practice and the APA model, children learn to imitate the trained therapist, which helps with reducing challenging behaviour due to communication barriers.

Little Souls centre owner Robyn Hawkins said she was inspired to open the centre 10 years ago when she couldn't find an early intervention program for her own son Ben who had classical autism.

With the help, Ben eventually attended mainstream school and was now starting university to study a bachelor of architecture.



Little Souls is the only centre on the Gold Coast to hold one-on-one therapy. Picture: Richard Gosling

“We help make them as independent as possible,” Ms Hawkins said.

“The main message is there’s so much hope for children with autism.

“It’s just a matter of giving them intensive care ... and they are capable of catching up to their peers.”