

National Autism Strategy
Submission from Abacus Learning Centre
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Social Inclusion - Are there any other issues experienced by Autistic people and their families and carers that prevent their inclusion in the community?

Children profoundly affected by autism are often excluded from participating in community settings such as childcare and kinder. This can be for a variety of reasons including lack of understanding, staff shortages and a shortage of skilled workers with autism experience. In addition to this, many autistic children experience personal barriers to accessing childcare. This can include fear of noisy spaces, support requirements around eating and drinking and challenges with transitions. Unless these barriers are addressed the child is likely to have an extremely negative experience within a childcare environment which may impact their ability to access these services in the future. This can lead to social isolation and lack of development of important social skills. In addition, this inability to access childcare and kinder creates a barrier for the parents of these children to return to work further impacting the social and financial wellbeing of the family.

Whilst Abacus understands the desire for all therapy to be conducted in natural environments, it is often prohibited by the child not attending those services. For many of the students that Abacus provides ABA therapy to, Abacus is their community. It is effectively their childcare service, where they have the supports they require to mix with other children of a similar age and develop positive relationships and experiences in their community. They receive 1:1 therapy for two, three-hour sessions a day and they participate in group therapy at intervals throughout the day, learning the basics of play, understanding how games work, and building their skills around social interaction. Our students significantly increase in confidence in this environment and our therapists work with them in their community settings to generalise the skills when they are ready to attend. In addition, Abacus provides parent coaching on ABA therapy strategies so that their home experience aligns with their onsite therapy. This gives families the confidence to continue to support their child to increase their access to their local communities. Our community ABA program enables us to provide both centre based therapy at Abacus and therapy within the child's childcare, kinder or school, allowing us to upskill those staff who are working with the student in their community setting. We also provide professional development to Early Childhood Educators and Teachers through our Autism Consultancy program.



