1.David Trembath - OTARC Research Theme video (4 minutes and 18 seconds):

The Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre is interested in language and development because it's one of the core features of autism.  When we look at the latest statistics coming in out of Australia we see that about 68 percent of children, adolescents and adult with autism, have significant difficulties communicating with, being understood by and understanding others.  So it's definitely one of the main areas of need.  And it also cuts across all aspects of life, you know, you need to be able to communicate well in order to succeed at pre-school, at school, in the workplace and in relationships, as an adult.

Well at the centre we believe that the best treatment for children with autism is a comprehensive developmentally-based intervention, that looks at skills across all areas of development, including communication, we can't separate communication from all other aspects of development.  At the same time though we also acknowledge the value of focused interventions, looking at treating I guess specific skills or difficulties that children have.  I guess irrespective of the way that we approach intervention, we're always looking at evidence based practice, evidence based interventions, and supporting only those interventions that have a solid foundation of research evidence.

At the centre at the moment, I guess if we look at the early years in development, we taking a very careful look at the children's development in the autism-specific early learning and care centre of the Margot Prior Wing.  So from a communication point of view, we want to look at the way that they're developing language, we want to see the process of that, the path I guess that children are taking in terms of acquiring language.  But also look at for kids who having difficulties there, looking at what else we might able to do to support their development.  So really in the early years we are very much interested in tracking children's development of language, trying to boost their skills from an early age, as early as possible, so that they have the best outcomes.

When we move to school age, we are very much interested in looking at the transition to school and how the support, the communication and I guess all of children's development as they make that transition.  And at the moment we're also particularly looking at focus strategies aimed at supporting students in school who still have significant difficulties with communication so we're interested in things like augmentative communication, use of electronic and non-electronic communication aids to provide children with autism, students, in primary school and secondary school, with an effective mode of communication so that they can access the curriculum and learn.

When we move to adults, really there hasn't been a lot of research into adults with autism and understanding the issues they face, individuals themselves face, but also their families, service providers, and just ways of supporting adults with autism in the community.

So what we're doing there is taking a first look or first exploring what the issues are.  So we're using qualitative research to look at the communication supports provided to adults with autism, we're trying to understand their stories and learning from their experiences and from there, we'll be able to take the approaches we use in the earlier years through using imperial evaluations, to actually develop new and better ways of supporting adults with autism to communicate.

Well we need to start by really better understanding what the language needs are of children with autism.  So in terms of where the centre is going in our research, we're going to take a careful look at children's development of language, better understand the path that they're taking and then looking at how our interventions can support that development, natural speech and language, more broadly.

We also though, at the same time, have to think about not just children who have significant communication needs, we also have children, adolescents and adults who have fine, more subtle communication difficulties, so it's about the way that they interact with others in conversations, the way that they initiate and respond to other people, and these are the subtle difficulties that can really be quite a disability in life in terms of finding work, maintaining relationships, etc.