



The Fire Brigade visits Mindstretch.



Visiting the Play Shed.



Exhibiting at the Autism Expo.



## Wrapping Up 2016

Hi, and welcome to Issue 9 of our newsletter.

The final term of 2016 has finished well, with several highlights along the way. We continued to research and invest in evidence-based learning tools. We also took educational trips beyond the classroom, and invited relevant experts to visit our school.

One visitor was the **Fire Brigade**, whose spectacular display enthralled our little boys and girls. We in turn visited the **Play Shed**, giving our scholars great opportunities for imaginary play. Meanwhile, our **Important People's Tea** let our learners and their families get to know each other better.

As part of our contribution to community, we held our third Cape Town **HANDLE<sup>®</sup> introductory course**. We also launched a **Community Lecture Series**. With as many as fifty delegates in attendance, we plan more public lectures for next year. Mindstretch also exhibited at the recent **Autism Expo**, the first ever held in Cape Town. And, as described on page 4, we are currently hosting two **UCT speech therapy students**.

None of this is possible without you, our parents and children, staff, collaborators and friends. I appreciate your commitment as we reach the Preschool's third anniversary and turn to another great year in 2017.

Please enjoy the newsletter and my thanks to Jacqui Couper for her article focused on early intervention.

With gratitude, Jennifer

*Mindstretch Founder and Preschool Principal*

## Mindstretch

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## Creative Communication

Some Mindstretch Preschoolers struggle with verbal expressive language, and so we create paths to alternative communication.

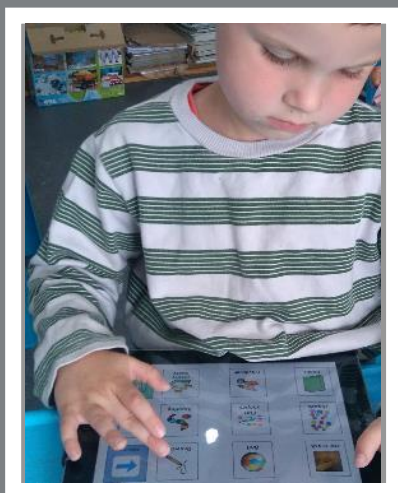
### Picture Exchange Communication System

PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) is one such path. Initially, students learn to exchange single pictures for items or activities they want. Later, they graduate to using PECS to answer questions such as "What do you want?"

We also use PECS to augment language. Speaking clearly, the teacher encourages the child to say the word at the time of picture exchange. Or, the teacher may model a sentence "I want... (here she pauses to give the child a chance to say the word; e.g., I want *water*).

PECS has been integrated into our school day to help some learners who struggle with verbal expression. It helps them to communicate better with us, and us with them. They are less frustrated as a result. Initially, we use a picture file to do this. Later we move onto an iPad.

We are also able to prepare the children for any changes in our routine by using pictures to show what's coming up, and what we expect of them.



A scholar gets to grips with the Visual Schedule.

## Visual Schedule

All Mindstretch classrooms have a Visual Schedule on the wall. These use pictures to show the activities for completion during the day, including the order in which they will occur. This helps orientate the learners to what is coming up, and helps prepare them for any changes to the usual routine. Some learners rely on the visual schedule to make their day predictable; others use it as a simple guide for their day.

Visual Schedules are also useful collaborative tools. In our older classes, the students use it to inform one another. For example, when one child recently asked "Is it snack time?", another said, "No, go and look at the board". The second child then went with the first and pointed out where they were in the day, where the snack would occur, and what needed to be done before snack time.

The visual tools were created with educators and families in mind. They are easily applied in the classroom and at home. For example, a Visual Schedule that uses pictures showing a sequence of events can make a supermarket trip or social gathering easier for the anxious child.

**Sometimes, pictures get the message across better than words!**

PECS in use on an iPad.

## Early Intervention: What is Early?

By Jacqui Couper

Early intervention is an important concept in child development, captured by the saying *the earlier, the better*. The brain grows at a phenomenal rate in the first two years of life, reaching about 80% of the size of an adult brain! Just see how fast a baby develops in a year, moving from a helpless new-born to a walking toddler. The young brain is 'plastic,' meaning it is mouldable and adaptable.

There is evidence that the first thousand days (pregnancy plus first two years) are most important in child development, laying the foundation for later abilities and relationships. When a child's development does not go to plan, perhaps due to premature birth or a condition delaying development, the early years are the best time to intervene.

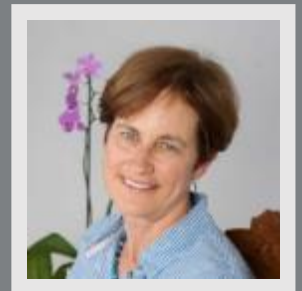
Early intervention is commonly thought to be for children aged three to five, an age associated with early childhood development (ECD) centres. While these are key years, it is never too soon to detect and begin addressing developmental difficulties. Research shows that babies who start an intervention programme before nine months do better than those who begin later. Waiting to act can mean it takes months or years to catch up.

The challenge is to detect a developmental difficulty early on. Some parents understandably do not want to know that their child has a problem. Others may discuss their concerns with a doctor only to hear that the baby 'looks okay.' Parents are encouraged to trust their gut feeling and persevere when concerned.

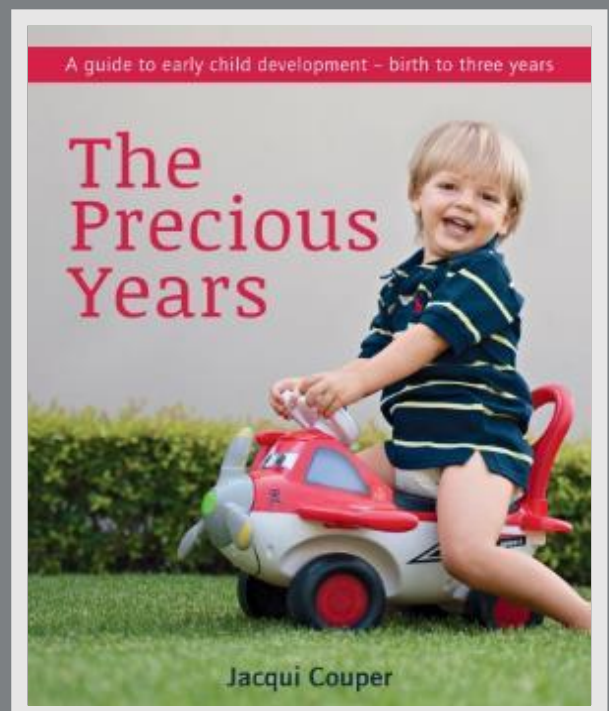
Early intervention is supported by good evidence for positive outcomes. It is also cost effective in the long run, for both parents and the state.

**Let's work together to promote early intervention.**

Jacqui Couper is an occupational therapist and author of the recently published guide to early child development, *The Precious Years*.



Her private practice in Cape Town focuses on early intervention for children under three years of age, an area in which she has sixteen years' experience. For more information, contact Jacqui on her cell: 082 908 5350.



### IN A NUTSHELL:

- ☑ A balanced, practical view on childhood development
- ☑ For parents of children aged 0–3 years
- ☑ Includes activities using low cost materials
- ☑ Provides tips for parents of children not exhibiting the average developmental 'milestones'

## Community Collaboration: UCT Visits

The recent protests at the University of Cape Town meant that many students were prevented from attending lectures and writing their exams on schedule. This led Mindstretch to reach out to UCT's speech therapy department. We offered to provide senior students practical experience while they wait to finish out their year.

Thus, Mindstretch is hosting two third year speech students, who volunteer their skills a couple of days a week.

Everyone wins: our learners get extra speech facilitation and the UCT students get experience.

Mindstretch believes that community working together will help deliver an optimal future for our children.



Thank you to Caitlin and Mawaddah of UCT..

## Something to Celebrate



In 2016, Mindstretch assisted twenty-four learners, with the help of a dedicated staff. It also marked the successful completion of the first year of our new Grade RR Intermediate class.

Our senior classes are fully subscribed for 2017, but we have space in our Kindergarten groups (ages 3–5). Please be in touch if you think your child may benefit — and please spread the news about Mindstretch.



## We Welcome Feedback and Subscriptions

- Email [jen@mindstretch.co.za](mailto:jen@mindstretch.co.za) with comments or suggestions for the newsletter, and please follow us on Facebook to receive regular news updates (our page is 'Mindstretch Preschool, Training and Therapy').
- To receive the newsletter, please subscribe online at [www.mindstretch.co.za/newsletter](http://www.mindstretch.co.za/newsletter).