

Kiralee's ready for school

By DEB MORRIS

BAXTER mother of two, Michelle Standing, first realised that all was not well with her younger daughter, Kiralee (left), when she was only 18 months and before she had started speaking.

"It was picked up by the health sister and I let it go for six months, hoping that Kiralee would begin to develop," she recalled. "Her speaking didn't improve, so I took her to a speech pathologist at the integration health centre in Frankston, who referred her to a paediatrician, who referred her to the department of human services, who referred her to Monash Medical Centre."

In the middle of all these referrals, she was told to contact Biala Peninsula Early Childhood Intervention Centre in Mornington.

"Kiralee had learning difficulties and cognitive problems. Biala observed her and interviewed me and she started with the centre in term 4 of 2003, when she was three years old," Michelle said.

"She started a program in Biala at the beginning of 2004," Michelle said. "Kiralee attended once a week for a two hour session. It was like kindergarten, but much more intense. There were four teachers to eight students."

Halfway through that first year, Michelle started noticing a difference. "There was lots more talking and socialising and joining in with the group. My husband, Garry and I were elated."

Michelle joined the Biala mother's group, which was led by a psychologist. "We'd talk about different topics, such as toilet training. Normal issues were discussed, but related to children with delayed development. Some parents felt ashamed that their children's development was delayed, as if it were their fault, but the psychologist really reassured them that they weren't doing anything wrong."

Kiralee attends the Hastings outreach program and will be starting regular primary school next year.

"I'm on the playgroup committee and the kinder committee because I so want to give back to the community after what Biala did for Kiralee," Michelle said.



KIRALEE, five, attends Biala weekly and is looking forward to next year's new adventure - primary school. Photo by DARYL GORDON.

Biala reaches out

MORNINGTON based Biala Peninsula Early Childhood Intervention Centre is celebrating during the week of August 13 to 21 to increase community awareness of early childhood intervention and the variety of services available to infants and young children with developmental delays and disabilities and their families.

The centre's programs provide services to families throughout Mornington Peninsula and Frankston. Its outreach program at the Peninsula Community Health Centre in Hastings and at Rosebud community house are run in addition to the sessions conducted at Mornington.

"At Biala we understand that it is very difficult for families in areas like Hastings, the southern peninsula, Frankston North and Carrum Downs to get to Mornington, where the main centre is

situated," said Biala Peninsula manager, Maree Grover.

The outreach services began in 1977 and has provided both staff and families with invaluable community links, Ms Grover said.

BlueScope Steel came to Biala's aid with \$2500 towards a second storey for the Mornington centre.

Biala has raised almost \$100,000 towards the required \$250,000.

"As the demand for early childhood intervention services grows along with the peninsula's growing population, so does the need for a bigger centre," Ms Grover said.

The week of community awareness for early childhood intervention services will culminate in Kites for Special Kids Day on August 21, 11am-3pm at Royal Park, Gatehouse St, Parkville.

For more information, phone Maree Grover on 5975 1820.