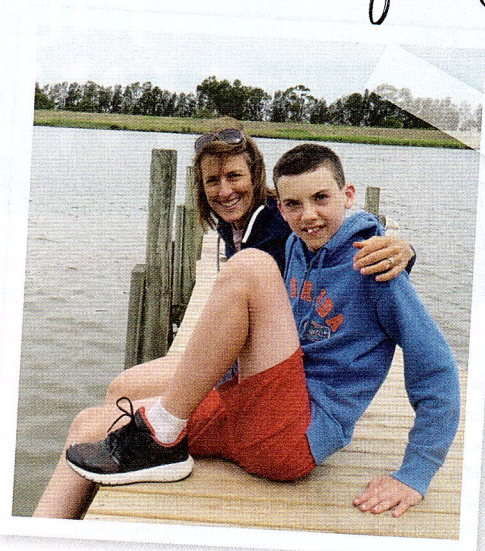


# SPARKING CHANGE

Sonia Maginnity's fascination with the brain started while working as an IT trainer. When her son, Lochie, was diagnosed with autism, her thirst for knowledge took on new meaning



ABOVE: Sonia Maginnity says Anat Baniel Method (ABM) NeuroMovement has not only helped her son, Lochie, but many others as well.

**L**ochie was born in 2005. He was induced, followed by an excruciating and traumatic three-hour labour for me. But he was pronounced healthy, so we had no inkling that anything was wrong.

He was slow to walk at 22 months, and had few words but we didn't think to worry — we thought he was taking his time, as some boys do.

At his two-year-old maternal health check-up, the nurse handed me his results with ticks in two boxes labelled "significant predictors of difficulties" and announced she was calling a paediatrician — now. So began our initiation into the disability sector.

Cognitive and behavioural testing, blood testing, genetic testing and the never-ending reports of all the things he couldn't do. Finally, a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.

I have tried to treat Lochie, 13, exactly like my other kids (Chloe, 15, and Tom, 8). I love him and cuddle him a lot, and help him to learn about the world.

Over the years I've done a lot of research on therapies, diet, behaviour, communication and more. I have taken him to early intervention groups, speech and occupational therapy, applied behaviour analysis and

numerous other programs, with varied success.

I try to avoid situations that cause him stress or to become overexcited, or where he could be excluded or teased. I know the signs of a meltdown and try to head them off early.

Much of the time he is smiling, happy and affectionate. He goes to a mainstream Montessori school in Melbourne. With mixed-age classrooms, specialised learning materials and freedom to learn at his own pace, Lochie's developmental delays don't stand out so much and he has incredible support.

It is designed to wake up the brain and provide information in a manner that increases its ability to perceive differences.

Since it was virtually unknown in Australia, I flew Lochie to the ABM Centre in San Rafael, California, for two weeks of therapy. After a few days he was talking more than usual; then came more small changes. From better co-ordination and self-awareness, to more abstract conversation and increased focus — it was a revelation.

The two weeks had a massive impact on me. Changing my view of Lochie from what he couldn't

Outcomes are different for each person and can include a reduction in pain, increased mobility and speech or movement where there was none.

Lochie's progress is like an intricate dance. One step forward,

## **"LOCHIE'S PROGRESS IS LIKE AN INTRICATE DANCE ... SOMETIMES HE LEADS, SOMETIMES HE FOLLOWS."**

It has been hard emotionally, financially and socially. I think my husband, Paul, and I manage to keep it together because, even at the end of the toughest days, we love and trust each other.

In 2015, our speech therapist suggested I read *Kids Beyond Limits* by Anat Baniel. Everything she wrote made sense to me.

The Anat Baniel Method (ABM) NeuroMovement is a gentle learning method, delivered through verbal instructions or hands-on movement. An observer could mistake it for massage but there is no comparison.


do to what he had achieved — despite his challenges — was pure joy. I wanted to be a part of it.

Three weeks later I was heading back to the US for practitioner training. I went back 11 times over two years and am now a certified ABM NeuroMovement practitioner.

I have worked with babies, kids and teens with a range of special needs, including cerebral palsy and autism. Older adults recovering from stroke, injuries and chronic pain can also benefit, as well as elite performers such as athletes and musicians.

two steps sideways, one back and another forward. Sometimes he leads, sometimes he follows, and the choreography changes as he masters some steps and falters on others.

The changes are subtle, but each small step creates new possibilities.

I am revelling in my new mid-life career and the chance to help others defy their prognoses and limitations. I have renewed purpose in my life and a positive way forward for Lochie. The possibilities are infinite." 

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