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# Libraries join autism story time

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EDUCATION REPORTER

BRISBANE libraries will begin trialling autism-friendly story-time sessions in a bid to boost the early literacy skills of children with ASD.

Libraries in the city offer free nursery rhyme and story time programs for babies, toddlers and preschoolers, but for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, the experience can be overwhelming.

Marleen Westerveld, a project leader with Autism CRC, said research indicates 30 to 60 per cent of children with autism will experience literacy difficulties.

"That is why initiatives such as autism-friendly story time sessions in libraries are so important - they help set the foundation for early literacy skills and encourage a love of books and reading," Dr Westerveld said.

Autism CRC has partnered with Griffith University and Brisbane City Council to

begin a pilot program offering autism-friendly story time at Ashgrove Library from next month.

Libraries will also receive a sensory checklist so the story time space can become a more relaxing environment for autistic children, including by creating quiet spaces and training librarians to better recognise signs of sensory overload.

Jess Odenbreit, whose eight-year-old son Byron (pictured below) was diagnosed with autism when he was three, said a diagnosis of ASD can be socially isolating. "We know how important reading and story time is for language development, but it is not just that, it is also getting out and doing something social and meeting up with other parents," she said.

