Winning formula fast becoming child's play

RENATO CASTELLO

JUDE Hepworth-Smith faces a challenging childhood.

The three-year-old can't speak, is vision impaired, has profound hearing loss and has a sensory processing disorder which means he's prone to more bumps and bruises than other children his own age.

But twice a week Kid Sense Child Development's founder Joanna Buttfield and her team work with the Crafers boy and his parents Bess Hepworth and Kirsty Smith to improve Jude's outlook on life.

"He absolutely loves it, he has such joy and delight to see everybody, not just Joanna, but the whole team," Ms Hepworth said.

"They have been able to affect Jude straight away.

"But the biggest thing we've experienced is the sense of approval and empowerment they have given us."

Unley-based Kid Sense wants to help more families and is seeking to raise more than $3 million from a capital raising via private equity investment, grants and loan funding through the State Government's Future Jobs Fund to expand its childhood occupational therapy and speech pathology service across Adelaide.

The Telstra Small Business Award winner is planning five centres within three years across Adelaide's northern, southern and western suburbs, employing an extra 75 staff.

Kid Sense managing director Conor McKenna, who children affectionately call "Shrek", said the first new centre north of Adelaide would open next year, adding another 12 employees to its 15-strong workforce.

"Basically, the key is a 20-minute drive to any centre, so that we so can we bring the occupational therapy, speech pathology and soon-to-be child psychology into the community," he said.

BRIGHTER FUTURE: Kid Sense Child Development founder Joanna Buttfield helps Jude Hepworth-Smith through his exercises, and inset, Kids Sense managing director Conor McKenna. Picture: AAP/KERYN STEVENS

"We're then going to move to Western Australia for two centres and the Northern Territory for one centre and then we'll face eastwards.

"With six centres in South Australia by 2020, the company's commercial intent is to create a national network of 30 paediatric allied health centres, employing a team of 380 child health specialists servicing children and families participating in the National Disability Insurance Scheme."

Mr McKenna said the company chose to expand north initially because the "vast majority" of the 17,000 children on the NDIS in SA were from the northern suburbs. Ms Buttfield established Kid Sense 19 years ago, but Mr McKenna said the National Disability Insurance Scheme had fast-tracked growth.

"The analogy I love is we built a ship but the tide was low . . . suddenly the sea rose, the wind blew and we sailed like crazy," he said.

"We just tripled the size of the business in a short period of time."

"I call it strategic serendipity, the NDIS came out of nowhere really and all of a sudden we had this market change, the NDIS just driving the marketplace.

"We are now able to service clients weekly for a full year because the parents have no longer got the financial burden of treatment.

"The ambition has always been to be the most trusted brand in child development in Australia . . . there's a very big opportunity in paediatrics to apply a business model to it rather than just a vocation – if you marry both of them, it's a beautiful business model."

KID SENSE CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Founded: 1998.
Staff: 12.
Location: Unley Rd, Unley.
Awards: 2017 Telstra Small Business Award winner.
Services: Childhood occupational therapy and speech pathology.
Plans: Has engaged KPMG to raise more than $3 million to expand to six centres across Adelaide over the next three years, starting with a new centre in Adelaide's northern suburbs in 2018. Ambition is for 30 centres nationally, employing 380 staff.

SA closes office in Qingdao

LUKE GRIFFITHS

THE State Government has "quietly closed" a Chinese office it set up in 2015 to assist South Australian companies with establishing subsidiaries in the country.

Originally located in Adelaide's sister city of Qingdao, SinoSA House was to be "a huge step in helping SA hi-tech companies to capture global markets".

However, its operations have now been consolidated within the State Government's Jinan trade office, 350km west, according to a spokeswoman.

A press release this May promoted an "expanded (trade) office in Jinan" but made no mention of SinoSA.

Brendan Mason was paid almost $48,000 last year to assist with "the closure of the pilot office of SinoSA", according to a Freedom of Information document obtained by Opposition trade and investment spokesman Tim Whetstone.

Mr Mason now consults to the Department of State Development as an adviser to its Chinese engagement strategy.

SA business consultant Anthony Coles said that his business, Sinosphere, rented office space to the State Government in Qingdao that allowed for SinoSA to set up in the city of nine million.

"Ultimately, the South Australian Government needed to rent within a government area in Qingdao, which it didn't want to do," he said.

"SA is not seen as committed to building deep business relationships in the area."

Mr Whetstone said the opening of SinoSA House was touted as a huge step in helping SA companies engage global export markets.

"Less than two years later, it was quietly closed by the Weatherill Government at a cost to taxpayers," he said.

"What message does the closure of the SinoSA House . . . send to our trading partners at a time when we need to strengthen our international footprint?"

Cheap parking for traders

GLENELG traders will be offered cheap all-day parking at a Partridge St site in a bid to stop staff clogging up available on-street spaces.

Holdfast Bay Council last week voted to allow traders to park on the top floor of its revamped Partridge St East carpark, for $4 per day.

Councillor Amanda Wilson said the spaces were barely being used and hoped it would result in extra trade. The cheaper parks for traders would be offered on a 12-month trial basis.

Bank falls push ASX lower

DECLINES from the heavyweight banks and health care companies have partly offset strong gains from the miners and energy players to send the Australian share market lower.

The benchmark S&P/ASX200 yesterday closed down 0.17 per cent at 5755.5 points, with financial, health care, retail and telco stocks all dragging the index lower.

Energy companies and the miners were well-supported, although the banking sector slipped 0.4 per cent.

Market volatility tipped to return

DOVISH: Djerriwarrh Investments boss Ross Barker

JEFF WHALLEY

VOLATILITY will soon return to stalk the Australian share market, which is "fully priced", according to the doyens behind the nation's biggest listed investment company.

And the reporting season next month will be crucial in determining whether stock prices and dividends can remain at their elevated levels, Djerriwarrh Investments says.

The listed investment house, which is managed by the Australian Foundation Investment Company, has also taken aim at the new federal bank tax and South Australia's proposed duplicate tax, saying it represents "double taxation" on the sector.

Djerriwarrh yesterday revealed its net profit fell 17 per cent in the year to June, to $33.7 million. It came amid a decline in dividends, particularly in the first half of its financial year, from resources and energy companies.

Reduced income from options also took a toll as a result of lower volatility.

Managing director Ross Barker said Djerriwarrh fund managers believed "the market is fully priced", and volatility was likely to return.

"Our expectation is volatility could well increase over coming months as the Federal Reserve and European Central Bank look to increase interest rates from very low levels on the back of improved economic conditions," he said.

The coming reporting season loomed large, Mr Barker said. "With a mixed outlook for the Australian economy, the upcoming reporting season will be crucial in providing support to current market valuations," he said.

"In respect of the banking sector, it was very disappointing as investors to see the Federal and SA State Governments seek to introduce a punitive tax on the country's five biggest banks, Mr Barker said.