

Autism advocates speak up for funding

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SUPPORT SERVICE:
Alan Smith, CEO of
AEIOU Foundation.
Picture: Darren
England

KERRIE SINCLAIR

A QUEENSLAND not-for-profit group changing the lives of families with autistic children says its future could be at risk unless the national disability insurance scheme is designed better.

The AEIOU Foundation's service for autistic children was founded in Brisbane in 2005 by parents James and Louise Morton when their son's autism treatment program was shut due to government cuts.

They used their own funds to launch an autism preschool and what began as a program for 12 kids now helps more than 200 in nine centres, including a Gold Coast centre launched last month. But foundation CEO Alan Smith says the NDIS may cause a funding crisis.

"Services like ours are seriously under

threat if the NDIS does not deliver appropriate packages for families to be able to access services like ours. And fundraising can't pick it all up, I'm afraid," he said.

Under current plans, the NDIS would offer families \$16,000 a year to pay for services. However, under existing state and federal programs, families currently can access about \$20,300.

"So we are \$4000 per child worse off than we are today. That's a significant concern because we're already battling to raise \$10,000 per child per year," Mr Smith says.

AEIOU's services cost about \$46,000 per child per year. More than a third of its families earn less than \$40,000 a year.

AEIOU's annual fundraising target is \$2 million just to keep its doors open.

Mr Smith said the foundation was talking to the Federal Government about the design of the NDIS.