The year was 1958, Robert Menzies was re-elected for his 7th term as Prime Minister of Australia, Monash University was founded in Melbourne, Baystone won the Melbourne Cup and Collingwood won its 13th Premiership in the VFL.

There was another significant event which occurred in 1958 across the other side of the globe which revolutionised the world of play and learning for children and their families.

On January 28, 1958, Godtfred Kirk Christiansen filed a patent for the iconic plastic brick with its stud-and-hole design.

The rest as they say is history.

The LEGO® name is made from the first two letters of the Danish words LEG GODT, meaning “play well”. Today, on average, every person on the earth owns 86 LEGO® bricks!

In 2012, 45.7 billion LEGO® bricks were produced at a rate of 5.2 million per hour.

Over the years many studies and research projects have been conducted exploring the educational and social benefits a child gains by playing with LEGO® bricks. These studies have now branched out to recognising the value of LEGO® play in children with autism and other ASDs.

What are the Key Benefits of LEGO® Play

For Pre School Children:

Spatial Skills

One of the many learning objectives of Preschool programs is mastering the skill of spatial reasoning, which helps students learn about context, width, height, and how to recreate complex models using their own set of blocks. Studies have shown this set of skills is almost always taught more effectively when students use LEGO® bricks.

Social Skills

Another major skill taught to young children in preschool is how to cooperate and collaborate with others. Theses basic sets of social skills are key to achieving future educational success.

By introducing LEGO® to pre-schoolers, the learning of those skills can start early. The presence of Legos, and their near-ubiquitous popularity among boys and girls in this age group, makes them a popular item and a central gathering point when they’re part of an unstructured play scenario.

Mathematical and Numeracy Skills

Playing with LEGO® bricks give students something to manipulate and demonstrates to them the nature of addition, subtraction, and basic math skills. Studies have long shown that students perform better when they have something to manipulate during the lesson. Their ability to work hands-on with materials that showcase addition and subtraction, perhaps by adding or subtracting blocks from a structure, shows them the real-world application of these skills and gives them a reference when they must perform the same mathematics tasks in a written form.

For School Age Children:

When children reach school age, this is where the real educational benefits of LEGO® bricks are optimised. Amongst other things:

- Lego provides tools that develop lateral thinking in a fun environment.
- It teaches children to think in three dimensions.
- It improves literacy as children work with instructions.
- It develops problem-solving, organization, and planning by construction.
- It improves creativity.
- It enhances communication and critical thinking.
- It develops fine motor skills.

Benefits of LEGO® Play for children with autism

We are only just beginning to understand the value of LEGO® based therapy for children with autism. Studies have shown that LEGO® provides the platform for easier engagement for the child which in turn allows them to open the circle of communication readily.

LEGO® blocks offer a highly routine, repetitive, structured form of play that many children with autism find appealing. Engaging in activities that work off their strengths builds their confidence. Therefore they are more likely to participate in behaviours that are often challenging for children with autism like creativity, imaginative play and socialisation.

One of the challenges often faced by children with autism or other ASDs is troublesome fine motor skills. The child is so engaged playing with LEGO® their motor skills improve significantly without even specifically trying to teach them to improve their dexterity.

Research conducted at the University of Cambridge concluded children with autism and ASD showed an improvement in social skills as a result of LEGO® Brick play. This leads to better engagement with their peers, which transfers to other settings.

We are witnessing first hand the high engagement levels in children with a utism and ASD at our Bricks 4 Kidz LEGO® workshops and classes. They are displaying social and collaborative skills with other children in an environment they are comfortable with and displaying behaviours which are absent in school classrooms.