



Autumn 2006

Welcome to this edition of Autism News. Unfortunately it has been a difficult beginning to the year with personal difficulties confronting our Family Support Co-ordinator and committee members. Firstly, Rose Clark took a much needed holiday through January but required additional time off for major surgery in mid February. While recuperating, Rose suffered the loss of her dear mother and we extend our sympathy to her, Mick and Thomas. We thank you for being considerate of Rose's unavailability, as we are not in a financial position to employ a replacement during such times.

Secondly, due to circumstances, Rosemary Rush has resigned from the committee of Autism Tasmania and as President of ABIT. Over the last ten years, Ro has made an enormous contribution to both organisations and her presence will be sorely missed. Our thoughts are with Ro and her family at such a difficult time.

Several committee members have also confronted transition issues in the past few months as their older children become adults (a whole new world), or teenagers move into high school. Such change brings many difficulties for families and requires time, effort and communication to make happen and be effective.

Last year I wrote that I had seen enormous change within the Education Department since Autism Tasmania began. While I believe this is true, there are families who are still faced with frustrations. Is it acceptable for a Prep child with ASD to be suspended for 10

days, whatever the reason? Is appropriate classroom support for students with ASD provided in mainstream schools?

However, on a positive note I would like to congratulate Ben Gardner on graduating with an Arts Degree from the University of Tasmania at the end of last year. Ben has been a willing speaker at past Autism Tasmania State Conferences, giving us a valuable personal insight into Asperger Syndrome. Well done Ben!

Ros Ward

President

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COMMITTEE NEWS

MEMBERSHIP

Thank you to those members who have promptly renewed their membership. A reminder is included in this mailing for those members yet to renew and I encourage you to do so if you are able. A strong membership base not only provides valuable funds for Autism Tasmania but more importantly assists when lobbying both government and the private sector. At the Annual General Meeting last year it was resolved to increase the membership fee, the first since the formation of the organisation in 1992. Membership subscription also now includes a GST component.

LIBRARY

Some time ago, John Christie, Principal of Giant Steps, allowed Autism Tas. the use of a room at Giant Steps in Deloraine to establish a base for our library and administration. This has been slow to get going and we thank John for his patience. Giant Steps has undergone considerable physical transformation since it began in 1995. New buildings have been acquired and developed, the in ground pool is magnificent and more recently the original drill hall has been painted inside throughout and the Occupational Therapy room enlarged. The Autism Tas. room is fresh and inviting and houses our library and administration records, which Mick Clark has spent considerable time organising.

The library is finally ready for some borrowing. Initially Rose will bring a selection of books to Family Support Get Togethers and in the near future, members wishing to borrow by mail will be able to do so. A complete book list will be sent to all members.

WEBSITE

The updating of our website is a major focus for Autism Tasmania and we are well on the way to achieving this goal. We will keep you posted on developments.

AGFEST May 4th, 5th and 6th

Once again we will be at Agfest raising funds for Autism Tasmania. In conjunction with National Foods, we will be

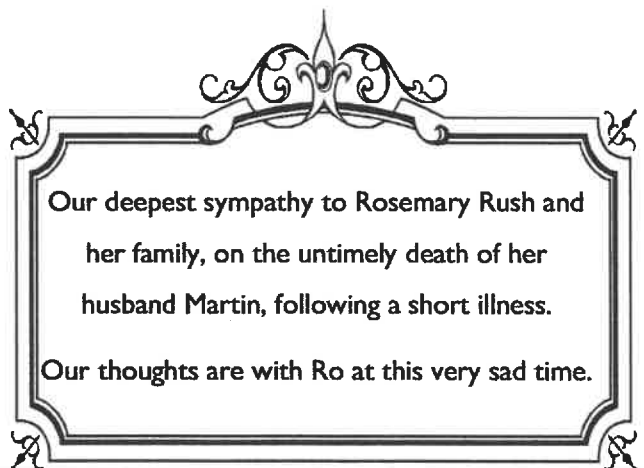
“manning” two milk vans, selling milk to the public, and operating a milk run to provide milk to the many vendors who serve coffee etc throughout the Agfest complex. This is our major fundraising event for the year but volunteers are needed to assist. For a few hours of your time a free pass to Agfest is available. Please contact Mick Clark on 0417 354 157 for further information or to volunteer.

AUTISM WEEK May 14 -20 2006

Please take note of the activities planned for National Autism Awareness Week. A Charitable Collection Day (Button day) will be held on Thursday 18th May but sellers are required to assist with this event. A Gold Coin Donation form is also included and this could win you a free membership for 2007. Winners of complimentary memberships for 2006 (as a result of their fundraising efforts last year) are noted in this newsletter. A Trivia Night will also be held in Launceston, make up a table and come along - a fun night is guaranteed!

DEANNE MICHAELS VISIT - SOCIAL SKILLS

Deanne Michaels will be visiting Tasmania in May to conduct some introductory social skills workshops in Hobart and Devonport. Deanne has written ‘The Social and Friendship Skills Programme’ package for primary school age children with Asperger Syndrome, high functioning Autism and ADHD and she has a keen interest in positive behavioural support. Please note details on the flyer included in this issue and contact Rose if you wish to attend.



Using Activity Schedules to structure Leisure Time

reprinted from Autism News (WA) Feb 2006

For many families, a huge problem is how to keep their family member with autism occupied when they are not at school or work. The person with autism may simply wander, apparently aimlessly, around and around the house without actually doing any specific activity, even when there are activities available that they really enjoy. Alternatively, they may do things that other people object to, such as dismantling the T.V. One of the difficulties with this situation is that, even though they seem to be choosing to do nothing, the person may become very bored through lack of stimulation. As we all know, when people get bored, they are likely to get agitated, cranky and difficult, and this is likely to impact on the rest of the family.

Even though the person seems to prefer to do nothing in particular, this is not the case. In fact, most people with autism can engage in a range of activities that they will find enjoyable. The problem is, however, that they are unable to choose and complete an activity on their own. Unless specifically prompted to begin the activity, they will do nothing or they will engage in a habitual behaviour with a favourite object. They become prompt dependent and require outside intervention to get them started.

This, of course makes it difficult for parents who need to supervise the person all the time and prompt them whenever it is time to move on to a new activity. Not only is it hard to do everyday things like cook dinner, when you have to constantly direct and watch the individual, it can also be exhausting.

Because the inability to independently choose activities to occupy leisure time is such a common problem in people with autism, Lynne McClannahan and Patricia Krantz have designed a tool to help people with autism independently move through a variety of activities without needing constant supervision. This is known as an activity schedule.

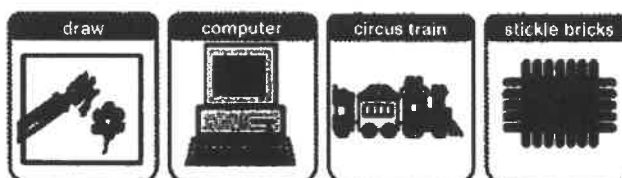
"An activity schedule is a set of pictures or words that cues someone to engage in a sequence of activities."

It is rather like the "To Do list" many of us have in

our diaries or on our fridge.

Providing an activity schedule frees the parent from having to constantly prompt the person to engage in the next activity, because the schedule provides the necessary cues. Of course, simply putting together a list or a book of photos will not magically cure the problem. The person with autism must be carefully taught how to use the schedule. McClannahan and Krantz's book "Activity Schedules for Children with Autism" describes in detail how to set up an activity schedule and how to teach the person to use it. If you are planning to introduce activity schedules, I strongly recommend that you read the book carefully first. (It is quite short.) In this article I am just going to summarise some of the important aspects of using activity schedules.

One of the benefits of an activity schedule is that it can take a variety of forms to suit people of widely different ages and abilities. For a young child, for example, the schedule might consist of 5 or 6 pages each with a large photograph of an activity. For a very able person, the activity schedule might look just like the "to do" list you or I might keep. Remember it is important to use the correct level of representation for the individual concerned. In other words, if the person is at the stage where they understand that a photograph represents an object, but does not yet understand drawings, you will need to use photographs. If they can understand pictures or written lists, then of course, you can use those. As an example, a beginning activity schedule for a young child might bearing binder with each of the following pictures in sequence.



Activity schedules can include a wide variety of activities, including indoor games, watching favourite videos, outdoor play, snacks and even chores. When

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first introducing the schedule, however, it is a good idea to include only things the person really enjoys doing. In this way we are not only teaching the person to follow their schedule, we are also teaching them to want to use it. Later, when following the schedule has become a well established habit, you can broaden it to include chores or less popular activities. It is important, however, that the schedule always includes a liberal number of enjoyable activities. None of us would accept a situation where we were confronted by nothing but work with no T.V, or activities we enjoy. It is easy to focus on all the things we feel a person with autism should learn to do such as washing dishes, filling their lunchbox etc. However, if we only include these activities on the schedule, the whole exercise will become punishing and unmotivating.

Since the purpose of the schedule is to teach the person to move from one activity to another without prompt, it is important to include only activities the person knows how to complete independently. If you want to introduce new activities into the person's timetable, the person needs to be taught the activity in the first place; and be given opportunity to practice and get the task right with assistance. In this way, when the activity is placed on their schedule, they will experience success and not failure which is always unrewarding.

When teaching the person to use the activity schedule it is important that you provide a minimum of verbal instructions. Ideally, the only instruction might be something like "Do your book." That would cue the person to go and complete their schedule. Do not go through the whole schedule giving directions for each step the person needs to complete. Remember, the point of setting up the schedule is that the person with autism can use it to keep themselves occupied, without being dependent on your prompting them. If you teach it by providing verbal prompts at every step, that is how the person will expect to complete it and they will wait to be prompted at every step. The authors of the book recommend that you teach the individual to follow the schedule by providing physical guidance at first and then gradually fading that. They discuss in detail how to go about the fading process.

Make sure that you have the materials the person with autism will need to complete their schedule. To return to the example of the beginning schedule above, you would need to have drawing materials, a computer the child could access, a toy train, and stickle bricks. Also, it is vital that these materials be organized in a way that the person with autism can access them independently. For example, the materials needed for each activity should be in a separate box or basket or place with which the child is familiar. It is no use having all the materials, but having them buried somewhere in a huge muddle of other items. Clearly, in this situation, the child will not be able to independently complete these activities. He will need help to find the materials he needs.

It is important to select activities that have an inbuilt ending, so that the person knows when they have finished. For example, if one of the activities is colouring, you might provide a basket with a packet of crayons and 3 pictures to be coloured. You would not include the whole colouring book, because that would imply that they needed to colour the entire book.

It is also important to remember that you can also use a schedule to encourage social interaction. If you want to increase the person's level of participation, include on the schedule items such as sharing a snack with a sibling, helping grandma to make a cake, or doing a jigsaw puzzle with mum or dad.

Hopefully, after this description, you will have decided that activity schedules may be a tool that can enhance the life of your family member with autism, as well as making things easier for the rest of the family. As I said, this article is a brief introduction and it is worth reading the book before you leap into action. However, please note that the book is very detailed and is written from an academic perspective with a strong emphasis on precision. Don't feel that you have to slavishly follow every step outlined in the book. Grasp the important principles and make use of the elements that apply to your situation.

Taking A Break. reprinted from Autism News (WA) Feb 2006

As we have discussed before in this column, caring for someone with a disability can be an absolutely full time occupation. Carers are often "on duty" 24 hours a day. Those of us lucky enough to sleep, even sleep differently. As you know, the slightest untoward sound can bring us awake and out of bed before we even know what is happening. We can't take a lunch break and tune out. Sometimes we can't even go to the toilet when we need to. Obviously, this level of vigilance and care is unsustainable. It has negative effects on our health and our sanity, and ultimately risks a breakdown in our ability to continue caring. **This is not news.** As carers, we know all these things. The problem is what to do about it.

One of the things we need to do is to somehow arrange to get some time for ourselves. I'm not for a moment suggesting that this is easy. It's not. It is, however, vital. Getting an opportunity to recharge your batteries is what makes it possible to continue in your role as a carer. Human beings simply can not go on forever giving out with no way of renewing that energy. This means that we actually have to make getting some **regular** breaks a priority. If you can get out-of-home respite (and this suits your family circumstances) that's great. However, there are many other ways of arranging to get some free time, from trading time with your partner to arranging with extended family members for them to help out. When I say "respite" I am including all these informal arrangements. Many of us hesitate to ask others for help, but, as I have said, getting that break is what makes it possible to go on being a carer. By the way, respite means time to renew your energy, it does not mean just enough time to whip down to the shop and get some groceries - although that is important too.

If we have been carers for some time, particularly in a situation that requires constant supervision and engagement, we may actually have difficulty when we first get respite. The first time I had a couple of hours of completely free, unstructured time, I didn't know what to do with myself. Carers often can become so used to being in charge and organizing and directing everything that happens, that we actually don't know what to do with free time and need to relearn how to take time off. Here are some suggestions:

Try to arrange **regular** respite, so that if you spend the first time just being disoriented and confused and don't actually get around to relaxing, you don't have to panic. What often happens is that our sense that this precious time is very limited, pervades our awareness and we can't let go because we are trying to relax in a hurry before our time is up. Knowing that there will be another time relatively soon takes away some of that pressure.

Plan: Plan ahead what you will do with your free time. I know, this sounds like the antithesis of free time, but it beats driving round in circles wondering what to do with yourself until your time is up. Once you get used to having some free time, this will be less necessary, but, especially at first, having a plan can be a good idea.

Prepare: Provide the respite provider with as much information as possible about the person being cared for (routines, likes and dislikes etc) so that you can relax about what is happening with them. Provide favourite objects etc that the person "has to have".

Persist: Sometimes, by the time you have done everything you have to get some free time, it feels as though it would be easier to give up and go back to

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doing it all yourself. This may mean that you need to work with the person providing the respite to try and make it work more smoothly. It may mean you are so used to being in control that you don't know how to let go. In any case, what I said earlier is true - you can not go on forever without a break.

Practice: As I have indicated, we actually get so much into the habit of being in charge, that we don't know how to take a break. We actually have to practice. In other words, the first few times you have free time, it may not live up to your expectations. After you have practised a bit, it will get better and you will start enjoying yourself.

The thing that prevents most of us from getting a break is that we know that the person for whom we care is at their most relaxed and comfortable when we are in control. We know their ways, we understand their communication better than anyone else, we know how to avert disasters or how to recover from one with the least cost. Because we know the person so well and have done this for so

long, we can care for them better than anyone else. That is most likely true. The person is probably better off in your care. Now, get over it. It is true that when the person is being cared for by someone else, they probably won't be as comfortable. This is where we have to learn to really accept that one person can not provide care 24 hours a day, 7 days a week without assistance. Because, the person is better off with you, you **must** have a break if you are to continue in your caring role. Of course, you will find the best possible care you can. Of course, you will not leave the person in a situation where they were unsafe or unhappy. I am certainly not suggesting that. What I am suggesting is that sometimes the person receiving care is not as comfortable, as they would be at home. Hard as it is, we need to accept this and take some time off anyway. Of course, we don't want them to be upset, we love them. But because we love them, we have to think long term.



When? Friday 12 May at 7.00pm for a prompt 7.30pm start

Where? at the Tamar Rowing Club, Launceston, West Tamar Highway next to Tamar Marine, just over the Paterson St Bridge.

MAKE UP A TABLE. \$15.00/PERSON

CASH PRIZE TO WINNING TABLE

LIGHT SUPPER INCLUDED

Autism Tasmania Trivia Night

Phone Penny Cromarty 6334 1119 to reserve your table now!

Ideas on How to Manage a Crisis.

reprinted from Carers Tasmania Newsletter 4th Edition 2005

Planning is the key to coping with any crisis that may arise. It can be reassuring to know that you have worked out how to deal with a crisis before it occurs. Listed below are some tips from an experienced carer that you could use if you, the carer, are suddenly unable to do your caring — for example, if you become ill and need emergency hospital treatment.

1. Firstly, talk to your doctor about this as they will be able to advise you, particularly on medical matters. Also, call the **Carer Respite Centre** on **1800 059 059** for advice on emergency respite.
2. Make sure you have a list of all medications used by the person you care for — call the **Carer Resource Centre** on **1800 242 636** to get a Medi-List Card, where you can list all their medications. Also, if you have not already got one, ask us for an Emergency Care Kit in which you can record important information like the name of your doctor, contact person, medications and so on,
3. Talk to family members and friends regarding your concerns about potential crises — maybe they could help on a short-term basis in the event of a crisis. Don't be afraid to ask for help!
4. It is also a good idea to have a small, pre-packed respite bag ready for the person you care for in the case of an emergency. Don't forget to keep a copy of the medication list and doctor's name and

phone number in the respite bag. Try not to alarm the person you care for with this preparation. Explain to them gently that you are putting together this information so that they will be cared for even in a crisis.

Of course, situations will always arise that you cannot anticipate for yourself or the person for whom you care and here are some suggestions on how to cope with these situations:

1. **Express whatever you are feeling** — accept your reactions as normal and do not be afraid to cry or call out for help. Do not bottle up your feelings.
2. **Talk things over** — talk to your friends, but do not overburden them, seek their advice and listen to them. Do not avoid talking about what has happened. If friends aren't available, call the Carer Resource Centre and ask to speak to a counsellor.
3. **Focus on things as they are now, at this moment-** do not blame yourself for something you did or did not do. Concentrate on the present and future in a positive way.
4. **Look at your problems one at a time** — trying to solve all your problems at the same time may make you panic, so tackle them one at a time.
5. **Consider all your options and choose the best** — look at the pros and cons of each possible solution before deciding what you will do. Then,

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when you have decided what you are going to do, act firmly and promptly.

6. Occupy yourself and your mind as much as possible — do not sit around worrying about something you cannot change. If possible, do something you enjoy; for instance some social activity, calling a friend or going to see a film. Religious people can find their faith and prayer a great source of strength and comfort in a crisis.

7. Do not nurse grudges or blame other people — we know this is not easy, but try to avoid getting hostile. In particular, do not get angry with yourself or your family.

8. Set aside some time every day for physical relaxation — make a point of doing something physical such as walking, swimming or gardening.

9. Stick to your daily routine as much as possible — in times of crisis a familiar pattern of regular meals and chores can bring a sense of order and security. Avoid taking your problems to bed and getting sleepless nights — try to 'switch off'.

10. Consult your family doctor when you need help — stress and crisis problems are probably the most common situations they handle, so consult your doctor sooner rather than later.

11. Contact your community resources — talk to social workers, community nurses, crisis centres, church organisations, community health centres

and, of course, you can always call the **Carer Resource Centre on 1800 242 636**.

12. Take care — be extra careful and avoid accidents, which are common during this time, as your mind may be on other things.

Finally, if nothing seems to help you deal with the crisis, try to accept what is happening and remember that all bad times pass.

(With thanks Carer NSW and John Murtagh, Professor of General Practice, Monash University)

Useful Contacts

Centrelink - Carer Payment: 13 27 17

Commonwealth Carer Respite Centre (free call) 1800 059 059

In- Home Emergency Support (South only): 6228 3899

Continence Helpline (freecall): 1800 330 066

Lifeline: 13 11 14

Kids Helpline (freecall): 1800 551 800

Some Important Considerations for all Students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder

Reprinted from The Spectrum, Vol. 1. No. 3, Spring 2005

As the end of term approaches, families turn their attention to holidays – The Autism Victoria staff has gathered the following information to assist parents, teachers and teacher aides with their planning

Anxiety

Many students with an autism spectrum disorder suffer from anxiety. This may not be evident in the ways we would normally expect to see a child express worry. The evidence of anxiety may be talking repetitively about the same topic, repeatedly asking the same question for reassurance, complaining about tummy pain, or trying to block out the world (either withdrawing, or making enough noise to drown other things out). These sorts of behaviours should be viewed as a sign of distress rather than misbehaviour. It is then advisable to simplify or help the student with tasks, or let the student have some quiet time.

Changes in routine

Students with an autism spectrum disorder often become distressed when there is a change in routine, due to their difficulties making sense of time. That is, they rely on things occurring the same way to make sense of a confusing world (Wing, 1995). If at all possible, prepare the student for changes to routine by telling them in advance, or showing them with a picture schedule. Simple modifications, such as allowing the student to sit in the same seat for small group activities, and having other classmates come to them may make things less confusing for them.

Language understanding

Students with an autism spectrum disorder have

difficulty understanding language. The ideal is for instructions to be given one at a time, with pauses to allow time to process the information. Most students with autism learn better when presented with visual information, rather than auditory information. If one-step instructions with pauses are not possible, showing a picture would help greatly. Alternatively, writing/drawing the instructions on the board when speaking to the group (or on a small notepad at the student's desk for individual instructions) is also helpful.

Seeking help

Students with an autism spectrum disorder may not spontaneously ask for help in class, due to their difficulty with problem solving. They may not copy the other students by putting up their hand to request help. They may sit quietly when they are having trouble and worry to themselves about what to do. Alternatively they may revert to speaking about something they are knowledgeable about to hide the fact they are having trouble. If either of these behaviours is present, check to see whether the student has understood the task.

Break times

Recess is a difficult time for students with an autism spectrum disorder, due to the core difficulties of social interaction and sensory processing. Many students are unsure of how to interact with their peers, how to join a game or activity, and how to follow the rules of the games other students play. Such students also have trouble with all the chaos, noise and movement in the schoolyard. Some

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students with autism may not even know what activities they can do at recess (which is intuitive and commonsense to other students). This confusion can lead to anxiety. This means recess and lunchtimes are not as restful as they are for other students.

Structuring the use of break times can reduce the uncertainty/anxiety. Structure may be achieved by offering choices of activities, preferably in a visual form, such as a picture schedule, a social story, or a written plan or list for recess.

Ideally, break times should be made up of part supported social play, and part quiet rest to prepare for re-entering the classroom. If at all possible, the students should be helped to join in the games or activities of other students, and the other students encouraged to include them. It may be that the student is encouraged to teach younger students a game. A useful resource is *Taming the Recess Jungle: Socially simplifying recess for students with autism and related disorders* by Carol Gray (No. 1913, available from the Autism Victoria library).

For the 'rest time' component of a break, there are several options:

- The student could have a quiet spot to go to at recess if the noise and movement gets too much. This may be a quiet corner of the playground, the steps of his classroom, etc. The teacher could show the student where this spot is, and later when needed, the duty teacher could remind the student to go there when he is getting overwhelmed.
- The student could spend some time at break periods in the classroom, library or another space indoors. If staffing inside these places is an issue, perhaps the student could be given some errand or job where staff are present (eg. watering

indoor plants, helping a class teacher put out materials for the next lesson, etc.)

- If none of the above suggestions are feasible, the student may be allowed to have 10-15 minutes quiet time on a beanbag or a quiet spot immediately after returning to class from breaks. Why not have relaxation for short periods across the day as part of the curriculum for all students? Stress management and relaxation are skills for all students for life.

Resources for primary level:

No. 2086 - Western Autistic School, English Levels 1-4, Reading and Writing: Adapted for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

No. 2087 - Western Autistic School, English Levels 1-4, Speaking and Listening: Adapted for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

No. 2389 - Annette Joosten, Annette Joosten's Book of Cool Strategies: A Personal Social Script Workbook for Australian Primary-age Students.

No. 2591 - Sue Larkey, Making it a Success, Practical strategies and worksheets for teaching students with an autism spectrum disorder.

Resources for primary and secondary level

No. 1586 - Janice Adams, Autism-PDD: Creative Ideas During the School Years.

No. 2590 - Sally Hewitt, Specialist Support Approaches to Autism Spectrum Disorder Students in Mainstream Settings

No. 2101 - Rita Jordan & Glenys Jones, Meeting the Needs of Children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders.

No. 1721 - Leicester City/County Council, Asperger Syndrome - Practical Strategies for the Classroom.

No. 2576 - B. Maines and G. Robinson, Children Can Learn with their Shoes Off.

FYI – Recovery and Counselling Centre

A new counselling service has recently commenced in Launceston.

In March, The Door of Hope – Recovery and Counselling Centre opened for the purpose of providing clinical psychology and general counselling services.

The Centre will open in two stages:-

Stage 1 now open Clinical Psychology and counselling

Stage 2 4th quarter 2006 Group Recovery Programs

The centre is located within the Door of Hope complex in Glen Dhu St South Launceston

Appointments are fee-based and are available Monday through Friday, between 9am and 5pm with some times available outside of these hours if required.

Appointments can be made via telephone on 634455901 or via email on rcc@door-of-hope.org

Key staff are:

Senior clinical Psychologist; Patrick Fleming

Associate Minister – Recovery and Counselling; Grace Fleming

Counsellor; Wayne Kerrison

The Door of Hope Practice manager, Paul Morrison welcomes any enquiries about the services available.

It's Agfest Time Again!

Make a day of it – spend part of your day raising funds for Autism Tasmania and the rest of the time looking around Agfest for free!

Our successful partnership with National Foods 'Pura Milk' brand continues at Agfest this year, in the first week of May. We'll be packing and selling sample bags, as well as running two vans and supplying the site with milk and flavours. Through Peter Hatters, the Westbury Venturers will again be helping but we'll still need a hand from Autism Tasmania members, friends and supporters.

It's our biggest fundraising event and essential to the continuation of our family support service, so please lend a hand if you can. We need help on these days & times – every bit helps!

- Tuesday, 2 May, 11am – 3pm - packing sample bags at the Pura Milk plant in Launceston.
- Wed, 3 May, midday – 3pm – helping set-up the sites at Agfest.
- Thurs, Fri & Sat, 4, 5 & 6 May 9am – 5pm, selling products from our refrigerated vans at Agfest.

2 people at each van for 3 shifts each day –
9am – 11.30am; 11.30am – 2pm; 2pm – 4.30pm

Call Mick Clark on 0417 354 157 before he calls you!

Regards, Mick Clark

Secretary - Autism Tasmania

Phone: 03 6424 2105 [w] 03 6423 1086 [h]

Mobile: 0417 354 157

Email: info@abnd.com.au

GIANT STEPS TASMANIA by John Christie

Giant Steps reached its 10th birthday last year and celebrates the beginning of a new decade with significant refurbishment of its school in Deloraine, and the appointment of new staff to strengthen the program which is available to the students.

Four experienced teachers, a full-time Occupational Therapist, a full-time Speech Pathologist and a team of qualified and experienced Therapy Assistants make it possible for every student to experience the best of autism-specific education in a welcoming and reassuring atmosphere.



Because of the support Giant Steps receives from both State and Commonwealth governments, parent fees have been kept at the same level for the past ten years. Students on the High Needs register can attend Giant Steps, and have access to the range of programs for only \$23 per day. Most students live in Launceston or Devonport and travel to school each day in one of the school buses. These buses operate at no extra cost to parents.

Although most students attend full-time, more than one-third have split enrolments with another school: perhaps two or three days at Giant Steps and the other days at their local school. For many students, this is a very successful strategy to give them access to autism-specific education as well as contact with their peers in a mainstream setting. Full-time students at Giant Steps can also be included in a mainstream school with the support of one of our staff. This helps to develop the skills they will need for eventual return to regular school.



The Giant Steps' program has developed over the years, adopting techniques and strategies used world-wide and based on the latest research into the needs of students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. No two students are the same so programs are individualized to ensure maximum progress. There are four distinct groups at Giant Steps, offering

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the benefits of a small-class setting. First Steps is an Early Intervention program for students turning 6 or 7 this year. No more than six students will attend on any one day, and the staff consists of a teacher and four aides.

Red Group looks after primary-aged children and provides programs in the areas of Communication, Social and Emotional Development, Foundation Academic Skills, Life Skills, and Physical Development. Again the group is limited to six, with a teacher and four aides.



Blue and Yellow Groups are both Adolescent Programs with a focus on Life and Leisure Skills pre-vocational activities and Community Access. Blue Group has a teacher in charge, but Yellow Group, which is more Life Skills and community based is the responsibility of our Occupational Therapist.

With the withdrawal of one student at the end of this term because of his family's move to Victoria, there are limited vacancies from the beginning of Term 2. Days could be available in any one of the classes and parents interested in knowing more are encouraged to visit the school to see our facilities and meet our staff.

I will be happy to show you around and discuss how Giant Steps can best meet the needs of your child.

John Christie – Principal



Free Memberships – Congratulations

Congratulations to the following members who, by participating in the Gold Coin Program in Autism Week 2005, have been awarded a complimentary membership for 2006.

- Louise and Chris Axelsen
- Carolyn Moore
- Mike and Barb Stewart
- Sarah Stevenson
- Deb Sauerwald
- Jon and Debbie Walker
- Sheree Willcox

ADULT ASPERGER'S GROUP

A group has been established in Hobart for adults with Asperger's Syndrome, or who suspect they may have Asperger Syndrome or High Functioning Autism.

This group meets on a Saturday morning at Tascare at Moonah. Enquiries may be made through Rose on 0407 320 048 or 6423 2288.

Rose is also in the process of establishing similar groups on the North West coast and in the North.

Anyone interested can contact Rose on the above numbers.

Autism Council of Australia: Communiqué from the General Meetings of the Board – October & December and the AGM, November 2005

- The Autism Council of Australia welcomed **Autism NT Inc.** as the Corporate Member representing the Autism Spectrum Disorder community in the Northern Territory. The Autism Council of Australia is now a voice for Autism Spectrum Disorder in each state and territory of Australia.
- Alison Bird, Executive Officer Autism NT Inc, and Judy Brewer Fischer have been appointed to the Board of the Autism Council of Australia. The ACA Board comprises Mick Clark, Amanda Golding, Judy Brewer Fischer, Alison Bird, Val McKelvey, Jon Martin, Verity Bottroff, Adrian Ford & Penny Beeston
- The next **Biennial National Autism Conference** will be convened by Autism Queensland and will be held at Royal Pines Resort, Gold Coast from 14 – 16 April 2007. x The Apex Foundation **Trust for Autism Grants** for 2006 were confirmed. Dr Umesh Sharma from Monash University, Melbourne and Dr Robyn Young from Flinders University Adelaide were awarded grants. Dr Sharma's project is entitled "Empowering parents of children with Autism to manage disruptive behaviour", and Dr Young's project is entitled "A two year follow up of the children of the university's Early Intervention Research Program." The grants were co funded by The Apex Foundation and the Autism Council of Australia using funds from a Thomas and Friends corporate donation.
- The Autism Council of Australia welcomed the formation of the Autism Research Alliance Australasia, convened by Dr Deb Keen, and a dialogue established.
- The Autism Council of Australia and Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia (A4) have developed a joint response to the Autism Forum convened in Canberra in June 2005 by Christopher Pyne, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Health.
- National Autism Week will be held from 14th to 21st May, 2006.
- The Autism Council of Australia Board Members participated in a process to develop a work plan for 2006, including the establishment of a part time Secretariat.
- The next meeting of the Board will to be held in Albury on 31st March and 1st April 2006.
- Autism Council of Australia – www.autismaus.com.au

Autism Tasmania Inc. Presents:

Developing Friendship Skills and Pro-Social Behaviours in Our Young People (For Parents & Educators)

Presented by Deanne Michaels

(Autism Spectrum Disorders Consultancy and Support Service - Canberra)

- What are the necessary skills?
- How do we support the development of these?
- What behaviours interfere with the development of friendships?
 - How can we modify these?

Deanne Michaels is a Consultant, Counsellor, Community Educator and facilitator.

She offers consultancy services to schools, community organizations, government and non-government organizations. Deanne has a keen interest in relation to positive behavioural support and education. She has written 'The Social and Friendship Skills Programme' package for primary school age children with Aspergers Syndrome, high functioning Autism and ADHD.

Saturday 20th May–Hobart

Carlisle Hotel: 9.30am - 3.30pm

Sunday 21st May- Devonport

Mersey Yacht Club: 10.00am – 4pm

Morning and afternoon teas provided.

Cost: \$25 per person



RSVP to Rose Clark by Thursday 18th May 2006.

Fax the enclosed sheet to: 6423 1086

or

Phone: 0407 320 048 or 64232288

(If leaving a message, please include your name and which presentation you will be attending).

Please read accompanying information sheet.



THE NEWSLETTER OF
AUTISM TASMANIA
INC.

Postal Address: PO Box 1552

Launceston, Tasmania 7250

www.autismtas.org.au

*Providing lifelong support to people
with Autism and related disorders.*

Family Support

Contact the
Autism Tasmania
Family Support
Coordinator,

Rose Clark
on
6423 2288 or
0407 320 048

or

autism@autismtas.org.au

This newsletter is produced
with the kind support
of the office of
Michael Ferguson MHR Bass

Autism Tasmania Support Groups

South

South – meet on the second Thursday evening in each month at Tascare, 231 Main Road, Moonah starting at 7.30pm. There is a coffee morning the following day, the second Friday (sometimes this is the 3rd according to how the days fall at the beginning of the month) at Munchkins, in Sandy Bay, meeting from 9.30 onwards. (Munchkins is located above Woolworths supermarket and is very suitable for young children.)

Cygnnet /Huonville - meetings as requested by parents – either in Cygnnet or Huonville.

North

North – Next meeting will be with the Autism Consultant for the northern region. Date and venue not confirmed but notices will be sent out.

Exeter – meet on the last Friday in each month at Tresca in Exeter, beginning at 10am.

George Town – meet on the last Wednesday evening of each month beginning at 7.30pm at the Wattle Group building located at the roundabout in Agnes Street, George Town.

NW and East Coasts

North West – Coffee morning coming up on May 11th from 10am onwards at The Red Olive in Ulverstone. The parent group then meet on the first Tuesday evening in each month at the Community Health Centre, Jones Street, Burnie (other venues according to speakers etc.)

Sheffield – new group just started. No specific time or date decided as yet.

Smithton – meet on the second Wednesday of every month at the Rural Health Centre in Smithton.

East Coast – meet at Scamander on days decided by parents. For meeting times and details phone Karen Rawnsley on 6372 5077

These groups have been established because of the desire of parents who attend them. At various times, speakers requested by parents are invited to share information. At others, parents swap ideas/strategies/information about services etc.

PLEASE NOTE: Dates and locations can change due to a guest speakers availability. For further information and details give Rose a ring on 6423 2288 or 0407 320 048