

Access Arts Link Junior Artist Program takes out Alex Walley Award 2008

In May this year the Access Arts Link Junior Artist Program in Launceston, received the 2008 Alex Walley Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Field of Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Rachel Cuthbertson is the co-ordinator of this excellent program and has contributed the following article.

While the Access Arts Link program originally only involved adult artists, in August 2006 this all changed. A seven year old girl with a real passion for art came along to The Studio to work alongside the Senior Artists. Initially it was about her being able to access a space as well as use the materials in a supportive environment. This young girl arrived with low confidence and major anxiety around making mistakes and taking risks. What actually happened after this was truly amazing! She initially needed an enormous amount of support from mentors until one day she realised through observing one particular Senior Artist's method that she liked to create her ideas in 3D before she painted them.

This artist, Matt Viney, who won last year's Alex Walley Individual Achievement Award for willingly mentoring this girl, was encouraged and supported around his own mentoring skills and became more confident teaching her each week. He was pleased to realise that she was inspired by his work and he could actually pass on his own creativity and skills. Over the months the Junior Artist started to believe in her talent and became willing to take risks – her confidence improved and she came to acknowledge the Access Arts Link space



*A Happy Sunflower
by a Junior Artist*

as her own. We celebrate her achievements as she now helps settle new students into the program, successfully studies with Distance Education Tasmania and has, through them, been accepted into the Cello Art program for the Creatively Gifted.

From this one student's extraordinary story began the Access Arts Link Junior Artist Program where we continually see the above pattern repeated. We worked voluntarily for 18 months however this year we now have limited funding which is a fantastic achievement and support for us to run the program with the recourses

Alex Walley Award 2008 (continued)

required. We of course, hope to secure more funding in the future. We also now work in partnership with the Education Department and we offer this space to give opportunities to artistic students with different abilities to work with mentors and other artists in a supportive and friendly environment and to create artwork that is meaningful and positive for them.

We often find (however not exclusively) the artists who visit us are creatively gifted students with Asperger's Syndrome. The junior program has been running for nearly two years and we continually see these students take ownership of their art and their ability. The environment is empowering and numbers are limited, so the group remains small to enhance the learning experience and we are fortunate to have an amazing group of mentors who are able to provide 1-1 support for the artists if required. Students are encouraged to work independently with their art – they are also given opportunities to exhibit. The relationship between the junior and senior artists and the mentors in this program has been innovative and profound and as this program grows from strength to strength we see both groups develop as artists that are able to take risks and see stunning results.

Ultimately we aim to.....

- Provide a safe, positive, caring and accepting space for the junior artists to create art where they feel they belong to a small team; all the while using their special interest to motivate them.
- Work in partnership with adult artists at Access Arts Link, families and schools within the Education Department to achieve the best possible collaborative outcomes for the junior artists.
- Use puppetry and stories to

provide support and education in positive social and emotional skills. In particular we explore sense of self, identity and belief in self as well as strategies for anger and anxiety. We role model positive interpersonal skills and we explicitly teach how to interact with others.

Currently we have students ranging from 9 to 14 years old in our program - from students who are on Distance Education whose main aim entering back into a group is to feel safe, to a few who are actually working toward becoming adult artists. Our program's success is a result of passionate children, supportive families, encouraging mentors, a highly skilled team at Access Arts Link as well as our funding bodies. The partnerships we have with the Education Department and our local community only enrich our sessions and we continue to encourage these links.

I gratefully accept the 2008 Alex Walley Memorial Award for the Junior Program at Access Arts Link on behalf of the children who are the Junior Artists in this program...

- they inspire us with their art
- they teach us with their wonderful perspective of the world
- and most of all they humble us with their perseverance to keep going amidst all the challenges their days bring

It is an honour to work alongside these artists and we will gratefully use the prize money from Autism Tas to enhance their learning experience with books and resources.

Rachel Cuthbertson
Co-ordinator
Access Arts Link Junior Artist Program

Congratulations to the Access Arts Link Junior Artist Program on receiving this award. Rachel has purchased a set of resources on Autism Spectrum Disorder with her award cheque.

From the Editor - Autism Tasmania's Future

Autism Tasmania is at a crossroads in its operation. Since inception in 1992 the only funding received from government has been in the form of grants for various projects. Despite submissions, there has been no funding to operate the organisation or to employ the part-time Family Support Co-ordinator - a position established in 2002. This part-time position has been funded entirely through Autism Tasmania's own efforts, at no cost to members.

The aim of the Family Support Service was to give people (members and non members) a point of contact when seeking information about Autism Spectrum Disorder and available service provision within the state. While two paid days each week ensured that Autism Tasmania moved away from being a purely voluntary organisation, there are still real limits on what we are able to do. A group of voluntary members has kept the organisation going while also constantly looking for ways to take it from being "a mums and dads organisation" to one which is able to survive long term in the disability field and provide ongoing help to people on the autism spectrum and their families.

The Family Support Co-ordinator has helped many people on the autism spectrum, parents, extended family members, professionals in the field and organisations who have sought information, support and advice. She has facilitated support group activities, led training sessions and provided counselling and direct help where appropriate. Autism Tasmania has not had the resources to be a service provider but Rose has built excellent links with other agencies within the community who can assist families.

So where to now? The Federal Government's *Helping Children with Autism* project is bringing new initiatives and a large amount of funding into Tasmania to help children with autism and their families. It is not the answer to all needs but a welcome

move particularly for families with young children. Of note is that children with an Asperger's syndrome diagnosis will be able to access early intervention funding - welcome news for this often forgotten group. You will find more information on this project over the next few pages and I urge you to read it carefully.

In the previous issue we outlined details of a \$50,000 interim grant given to Autism Tasmania [and each of the other state and territory autism associations] in March, to build our capacity in preparation for delivering other *Helping Children with Autism* initiatives. The funding has been used for the first census to determine numbers and locations of children with ASD in Tasmania, developing and upgrading the website, developing information and advertising materials, adding to our library and purchasing office equipment to allow Autism Tasmania to operate a proper administrative service. The spending plan was approved by FAHSCIA, the funding body, who were impressed with the way in which the grant was being used to extend existing services and build a stronger foundation for the future. The new website is nearly ready and while there may be a few teething problems we look forward to your feedback. The independently conducted survey for the census will also be launched soon, once it receives formal approval from the Tasmanian Human Research Ethics Committee.

Further to the interim grant, Autism Tasmania was invited to apply to operate the Autism Advisor service in Tasmania and will know at the end of September if successful. This service is the information and administrative link between diagnosis and early intervention access for parents and carers of young children and fits perfectly with Autism Tasmania's existing information and support services. The *Helping Children with Autism* initiative and especially the Autism Advisor service, reinforces Autism Tasmania's view that families have the right to full and fair information and to make informed choices about the intervention that best suits their child's needs and the needs of the whole family.

Applications have been sought by FaHCSIA from throughout Tasmania for the Panel of Early Intervention Service Providers (more information on pages 5 and 6) and we await information about the multi disciplinary teams or consortiums approved to deliver these subsidised services to families in the state. Probably the most important question is whether there will be enough providers to meet the demand? It is quite possible there may only be a few providers to serve the whole state. Whatever eventuates, there is a great opportunity to use the collected information and people's real experiences to focus the attention of Federal and State governments on services for people on the autism spectrum, their families and carers.

It is a time of unprecedented change and the workload since November last year has been relentless. Autism Tasmania is not a professional body - but a group of volunteers (all parents or grandparent of a child on the autism spectrum) who have freely given their time and energy to the organisation, constantly trying to manage these voluntary commitments against their family and work demands.

No one will disagree that services in Tasmania are still inadequate, not just for children but also for people with Asperger's syndrome and for adults on the spectrum. There is still much more that needs to be done.

Ironically, at a time when we have in front of us the funds to dramatically

expand services throughout the State for parents and carers of children with ASD and use this initiative to secure recurrent funds from the State Government, which over many years has avoided its responsibilities in this area, the Association is being attacked from within. A letter to some members has been sent by this group outlining their dissatisfaction.

Unfortunately an outcome of this discord has been the resignation of Penny Cromarty as President. Dr Andrew Davies is filling this role in an acting capacity until the Annual General Meeting.

I urge you to attend the upcoming Annual General Meeting and have your say about the future of Autism Tasmania.

Also of interest is the establishment of the autism specific early learning child care centre on the north west coast. This will be a boon for an often neglected area. However in a meeting with Bill Shorten, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities, Autism Tasmania representatives expressed concern at the need for such a facility in the south of the state. Perhaps Southern Tasmania needs some Federal marginal seats!

This edition of Autism News (compiled by volunteers) is late due to the current overwhelming demands and we apologise for any inconvenience. We aim to have another issue out before Christmas to keep you informed of the Helping Children with Autism initiatives.

**Autism Tasmania Inc.
Annual General Meeting**

Sunday 28th September
2008

Grand Chancellor Hotel,
Cameron Street, LAUNCESTON

1.00 pm

Autism Tasmania Committee

Acting President

Andrew Davies

Vice Presidents (2)

Ros Ward

Treasurer

Neil Gardner

Secretary

Mick Clark

Ordinary Members

Louise Davies

Stephen Ecob

Peter Hatters

Roger Law

Carolyn Moore

Helping Children with Autism Initiative

The Federal Government has committed \$190 million for four years to June 2012 to deliver the Helping Children with Autism initiative and this exciting project is now underway. There are a number of components to the package which fall under the responsibility of several government departments.

In this article we will endeavour to give readers an outline of the initiatives and what it may mean for you. However this project is still in the early stages and you are encouraged to refer to relevant government websites for the latest information. At each relevant website you will find fact sheets to assist. Alternatively call the Helping Children with Autism Enquiry line 1800 289 177 or contact Autism Tasmania (contact details on the back page) for further information.

Diagnosis and Assessment New Medicare Items for the diagnosis and early intervention treatment for children with autism or PDD.

This initiative is provided by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aging (DoHA). Families now have the option of using the Medicare rebate system to contribute to the costs of private assessments for children **up to 13 years of age**. The rationale behind this move is to increase access to early and accurate diagnosis and prompt early intervention following diagnosis.

From July 1st this year, families have the option of using the Medicare rebate system to pay for private assessments by a paediatrician or psychiatrist after referral by a GP. According to the DoHA website, "once seen by these practitioners, they will assess the child's condition, develop an accurate diagnosis and create a treatment and management plan if appropriate." The paediatrician or psychiatrist may also seek assistance from allied health professionals - psychologists, speech pathologists or occupational therapists. The rebate allows for a total of **four** services during the assessment process. A clinical diagnosis (of Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, PDD-NOS, Rett's Disorder or Childhood Disintegrative Disorder) needs to be signed off by a paediatrician or psychiatrist.

Once a treatment plan has been formulated, families may access 20 visits (in total) from a speech pathologist, occupational therapist or psychologist for early intervention treatment following diagnosis. The 20 services can be used by accessing one professional eg speech or a combination of all three. The 20 treatments are the total amount that can be accessed by any one child in a lifetime.

Speech pathology Australia and Occupational Therapy Australia's websites both state that the benefit is 85% of the scheduled fee and the rebate is \$67.50 per visit. As allied health professionals charge varying rates, check with your provider (speechie, OT etc) to see what the gap will be for you. The rebate for psychology services is also 85% and is \$76.65.

Increased access to Early Intervention Services \$12,000 early intervention support for children 0-6 years

Children aged 0-6 years and not in full time schooling will be able to access \$12,000 (\$6,000 per year over two years) for individual assistance of structured and intensive early intervention services such as one-on-one intensive activities and tailored group and individual programs. Parents will be able to choose from the approved panel of Tasmanian early intervention providers which may include speech therapy, occupational therapy, psychology as well as ABA (Applied Behavioural Analysis). We will all know the exact mix of available providers in Tasmania when it is announced. Rural and remote

families will be eligible for an additional \$2,000 to assist with accommodation and travel to and from support as well as training, respite and resources such as books and computers to access online information.

The Federal Government recognises that parents have a right to choose the service which best suits their families needs. Government also wants families to be confident in the services they choose for their child. As a result FaHCSIA (Dept of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) is currently establishing a panel of early intervention service providers based on evidence-based best practice guidelines. Service providers on the panel are required to offer multidisciplinary services as a collaborative team or consortium of providers, that together provide the required services.

Applications for the panel of providers closed in August and will be assessed by an eminent national panel. Providers need to show that they are able to provide an autism specific program tailored to the needs of individual children which follows best practise guidelines. Each provider will be assessed in its capacity to deliver a value-for-money and sustainable service. The expectation is to have the panel of preferred providers in place during October 2008

Children are not eligible for this funding once they begin full time schooling or turn seven years of age (whichever happens sooner). Children already in early intervention can access this funding. Families may choose to use this funding within a short period or spread it over the course of a financial year.

Autism Advisor Service

The Autism Advisor Service will provide the link between clinical diagnosis of ASD and access to early intervention programs and support services. Forty autism advisor services will be created around the country, of which Tasmania will have one. This advisor service will provide an information and coordination service for families and carers of children aged 0 – 6 years who are diagnosed with an ASD. It will assist families and carers by providing specific information and referrals to the most appropriate early intervention services.

The Autism Advisor Program will also be the gateway for access to the Early Intervention funding package as outlined above. Naturally, the service will also provide information on all the other components of the HCWA program.

Autism Tasmania was invited to prepare a submission for the Tasmanian Autism Advisor Service, and Bill Shorten, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Children's Services, is due to announce the results of this process at the end of September. If successful this would enable Autism Tasmania to develop a 'one-stop shop' for ASD information, support and administration throughout the State building on our existing information and support service.

Professional Development

The Helping Children with Autism package recognises the need for positive partnerships between families of children with ASD and schools. The Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium (AAETC) will deliver *The Positive Partnerships: supporting school aged students on the autism spectrum* project. The two components of this project are professional development for teachers and other school staff to support students with ASD's and workshop and information sessions for parents and carers of school students with ASD. School aged refers to students in a primary or secondary school in all school sectors and across all educational settings. Both components will be delivered nationally.

At present dates are being finalised for these sessions to be conducted in Tasmania. The parent/carer workshop and information sessions will help families work in

partnership with their child's school to improve their learning outcomes. The parent/carer workshops and information sessions will be held over two consecutive days and will complement the professional development offered to teachers. Online workshops and materials will be offered to parents if they are unable to attend in person and a website for interactive online learnings being developed.

These workshops aim to give parents/carers an understanding about the processes and strategies for effective parent, school and teacher partnerships; specific strategies on how to advocate to support your child's ongoing learning in his/her current educational environment; information about your local school's processes to support learning at all stages and opportunities for you to network with other parents and carers and local support personnel.

PlayConnect Playgroups

PlayConnect Playgroups are a component of the Helping Children with Autism package. These are being co-ordinated by Playgroup Australia and according to their website, "PlayConnect playgroups will offer play-based learning opportunities for children with ASD or ASD like symptoms and create social support networks for their families and carers."

A Tasmanian stakeholder information forum is being held in Launceston on 3rd October 2008 at the Mercure Hotel, Earl Street at 11am. Further information is available at Playgroup Australia's website.

Useful websites

www.FaHSCIA.gov.au (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs)

www.health.gov.au/autism (Department of Health and Aging)

www.dest.gov.au (search "autism")

www.autismtraining.com.au (AAETC website)

www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au (Speech Pathology Australia)

www.ausot.com.au (Occupational Therapy Australia)

www.psychology.org.au (Australian Psychological Society)

www.playgroupaustralia.com.au (Playgroup Australia)

Autism Specific Early Learning and Care Centre on the North West Coast

The establishment of an autism specific early learning and care centre on the north west coast is part of the Australian Government's broader commitment to eventually establish 260 such centres across Australia. Six will be established in the first instance with one in Tasmania. This project is an additional commitment to the Helping Children with Autism package.

According to information from FaHCSIA, the autism specific early learning and care centres will provide child care for children aged 0 to 6 years with ASDs and will aim to have a positive impact on their long term life outcomes. Each centre will be an approved long day care centre with the capacity to deliver a minimum of 20 approved child care places for children aged 0 - 6 with ASDs. The autism specific centres will provide early learning programs and specific support to children with an ASD in a long day care setting.

Applications have been sought from service providers for all centres nationally. Applicants will be required to demonstrate expertise in child care; expertise in the provision of early intervention services for children with ASDs aged 0-6 and their

families and carers; an affiliation with a relevant university or hospital specialising in paediatric, early childhood or ASD-related research or services and compliance with all relevant state and commonwealth standards, regulations and licensing requirements for long day care centres. These applications close on September 26th.

Autism Tasmania has approached Andrew and Marissa Barry, who were the chief lobbyists behind securing the centre in the marginal seat of Braddon, to report on the progress to date. We hope to bring this to you in the next issue.

Autism Tasmania Research

Preparations are advanced for an important research project to be conducted by Autism Tasmania. Funded by the Helping Children with Autism initiative, Autism Tas. will be conducting a statewide survey of children with ASD and the experiences of families gaining diagnosis, services, support and education.

This survey will provide strong statistics to identify problems and strengths and will be used by Autism Tasmania to develop its own programs and lobby government to provide better services where they are needed. It is hoped that everyone will participate when we contact you in the near future. It is important to get as complete a picture as possible.

Contact Dr Andrew Davies Andrew.Davies@utas.edu.au for further information.



Volunteers Needed for University of Tasmania Study

The University of Tasmania is conducting a study into repetitive behaviour in children with Autism and we are looking for participants.

As you are most likely aware, an insistence on sameness or resistance to change, are common features of Autism, and indeed, the associated problem behaviour often has an effect on the child's social participation and family life. The study is a Doctoral research project which aims to find out what motivates children with autism to resist change.

If you have a child with autism aged between two and ten years old, we would love to hear from you. Your participation in this study will help us to find new ways of assessing these behaviours, and also for teaching children with autism how to tolerate change. our participation will involve completing a number of questionnaires related to motivation, behaviour and adaptive functioning.

For more information on this study, please contact Nadia Ollington:

Phone (work) 62 262810 or (mobile) 0450 329902, email:

Nadia.Ollington@utas.edu.au

Carey Denholm (Supervisor): 62 267380, email: Carey.Denholm@utas.edu.au

Autism Tasmania's views on autism intervention methodologies for children:

- Educational services be based on sound evidence and quality indicators and that they be responsive to all children across the autism spectrum, including children with Asperger's disorder who are frequently not diagnosed until they are at school;
- There is no one program that suits all children and their families, as each child with autism will have a different pattern of strengths and needs, just as each family will differ in their goals, strengths and needs;
- A range of educational approaches and settings are required for children with an autism spectrum disorder, based on the specific needs of each child. For most children this will range from specialised autism-specific programs to mainstream programs with appropriate adjustments. There is a significant minority of children who will require very specific help through home-based programs and/or distance education, to enable them to reach appropriate educational goals for participation in formal educational settings.
- It is important for families to be fully informed and make independent choices about the intervention that best suits their child and family's needs. For example, the published Guidelines for Best Practice for Early Intervention provide an important reference to help parents, carers and professionals judge the value of a program for a particular child;
- Family members, especially parents, need support and information from professionals involved in a child's intervention program, so they can work as valued partners and gain the skills necessary to be actively involved;
- Intensive educational and behavioural interventions have produced positive outcomes for children on the autism spectrum, while there is little supporting evidence for other kinds of programs, or for dietary, medical or drug treatment. Many families, however, do try a variety of alternative therapies.
- For early intervention, the most systematic evidence available has come from evaluations of intensive behavioural interventions [IBI] as individualised programs involving the systematic use of ABA techniques, including Discrete Trial Training [DTT], usually delivered on a one-to-one basis for at least 20 hours each week. These evaluations have shown improved learning and behavioural development in a significant proportion of children. The Lovaas program, which evolved from Dr Ivor Lovaas' groundbreaking study published in 1987, is one example of this approach.
- Behavioural teaching, based on ABA methods, need not necessarily be intensive and one-on-one and there are many situations where it is used in conjunction with other techniques. Teaching living skills such as toilet training and managing problem behaviours are examples;
- Governments have a fundamental obligation to assist families with the financial and logistical demands that are placed on them when they participate in an autism intervention program for their child. Many families cannot do it alone. For example, the Federal Government's *Helping Children with Autism* initiative recognises this with its recent announcements of Medicare rebates for diagnosis, treatment plans and access to specialist services and the subsidies that will enable more families to access early childhood intervention services.

Reference sources:

Roberts, J. M. A. & Prior, M. [2006] – A review of the research to identify the most effective models of practice in early intervention for children with autism spectrum disorder. Australian Government, Dept of Health & Ageing.

Prior, M. & Roberts, J. M. A. [2006] – Early Intervention for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Guidelines for Best Practice. Australian Government, Dept of Health & Ageing.

Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders – National Call to Action, 2008

O'Reilly, B & Smith, S. [2008] - Australian Autism Handbook

Stories from the Field

Sharing ideas about what works

Em's Story*

This story has been contributed by Em's Mum and tells the story of a young woman with Asperger's syndrome moving out of home.

Our daughter, Em, who has a diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome, came home from a "Preparing for Work" course at TAFE four and a half years ago, saying they were being encouraged to move into flats and be independent. Her elder sister was already living independently, but we never imagined this would be possible for our daughter with AS. At this time she was 25yrs old, highly anxious and having difficulties with activities of daily living. Em avoided preparing food and her diet was limited to a few items. Hygiene was avoided and needed prompting, teeth cleaning, hair brushing, washing and showering remained stressful and changing clothes was often forgotten. She still preferred to do a lot of her creative work on the floor and there was always an amazing collection of books, C.D's, tapes, clothes and paper all over the floor in her room. We had given her the large attic room with a bath room in a step to independence and to encourage her to look after this area. It didn't.

Em was not interested in food shopping, she preferred spending money on her latest interests, budgeting was a nightmare, and she avoided house work. She was socially isolated with only one or two people she saw as friends with whom she had limited contact. Em relied heavily on Mum, emotionally and physically and also for transport.

At this time she was now highly motivated to find a flat turning the family upside down in the process. She found places in the newspaper ads, actually made phone calls with some

help and had to go and see the places NOW! There were disappointments, and a very stressed Mum but eventually we found a suitable place which was only 5mins from where we lived. Then there was the move and that was stressful! But we did it and she moved in and continued to live as she had done at home. She still required huge support from me with cooking shopping, washing and cleaning but she was able to get to TAFE on the bus. We were really proud of what she had achieved. We arranged for her rent, Hydro and Telstra to be paid by Centrelink out of her disability pension before pay day. She was also given some rent assistance from Centrelink. She coped for about nine months with high levels of support from me, then my husband and I went overseas for 6 weeks. I arranged for some second daily support through Disability Services which was made available plus some of our friends here on stand by. Unfortunately she was a mess when we returned. She had lost a lot of confidence and was even more anxious and dependant.

Em stayed in the flat but was not happy. We had over the next months moved to a new area now about 20 minutes away and after several weeks of driving up to her flat each night after anxious phone calls and with all the daily support, we looked for a place closer to where we now lived. Em desperately wanted to move back home, but we were now in a much smaller place and it would have been very difficult. A gain we were very lucky to find a place for her only 2mins up the road, so once again we had a stressful time moving and setting up 'house'.

Now after two and half years, Em is twenty nine, still lonely at times but is putting tentative roots down in this

community. She is becoming involved with the local church and a play group where she helps out. Em completed a TAFE course last year and tried to look for work through a disability employment agency (but that is another story). We have in the last six months been given a partial ISP which gives her two hours of in-house support twice a week - she is waiting for a full ISP. This will allow me

as her mother to step back and give her more independence and me more time for me. I love our daughter and admire her continuous courage to achieve what we thought would be impossible. She deserves all the help she can get and there are still so many unmet needs.

**Please note : 'Em's name has been changed to protect her privacy.*

I went to Darwin

Isabel Duharte (14 years old) has contributed this story about her recent holiday in Darwin. This wonderful trip was made possible by Variety, the Children's Charity. Similar trips have now been experienced by a number of Tasmanian children.

I went to Darwin and I had a nice time. The plane hurt my ears a bit when it took off. We went to Brisbane on the way and saw our friends Kerren, Michael, Taylor, Daniel and Holly Isabelle. We had tea with them. We had supreme pizza. I liked it. I watched a movie with Holly Isabelle downstairs and Holly was taking all of the blankets off Daniels bed. Daniel threw pillows at Holly and Holly hurt herself on the door. That night we flew to Darwin and stayed at a Hotel. I got up early and got dressed, had Coco Pops for breakfast, and then we waited for the bus to come. On the bus I met Rebecca and Lexie and Mala and Mahima and Ben, but forgot the other boy's name (who was sleeping on the bus).

When we got to camp we met more people and played some games. We played an egg and spoon game, a donkey riding game and duck, duck goose. After the games we put our things in our tent and had tea. After tea we watched 'Enchanted' and then went to bed. I slept in a tent with Rebecca, Lexie and Claire-Louise. I couldn't sleep because the boys were shouting near our tent.

In the morning we got dressed, had breakfast and brushed our teeth. Lots of motorbike riders came to take the kids for a ride. I was a little bit scared but I liked it. I rode a motorbike with Flame. Me



Isabel in Darwin

and mum called him flame because he had flames on his t-shirt. I had a ride on a 3-seater bike with Ben and Destin. At the end Ian asked me to make a speech. I thanked the motorbike people for taking the children for a ride and everyone clapped. In the afternoon I went swimming with Sharbs and some other kids. After swimming we had tea and watched a video from the camp last year. Then we went to bed.

In the morning we got dressed and had breakfast. We put on our variety t-shirts and we went on the bus to Mindil Beach. At Mindil beach they had made beer cans into boats. There was a market with different foods, but I had chips. After lunch we went to the sea life museum and they talked about the different kinds of fish. I didn't like the scary fish. Mum and Natalie got left behind at Mindil beach. That night we had a disco. I put my dress on and the sparkly earrings that mum bought me at Mindil beach. We also had dangly fluorescent earrings, necklaces and bracelets and a love heart

necklace that shined when we pressed a button. I danced with Ben. After the disco we went to bed.

The next day we went around near the Billabong and did rock climbing, abseiling and went on a flying fox. I didn't want to do these activities but next time I think I will do the rock climbing – but not the flying fox, because that was really high. Then we went swimming again and I played volleyball and the ball hit me on the head. We went back to camp and had a shower and then we had tea and went to bed.

The next day we went horse riding. I played flags on a horse called Minka. Minka looked like Del Serene who was my Robert's horse. I patted Minka and washed another horse with shampoo and then rinsed it. I got hair on my hands from the horse. I brushed the horse as well. I had a picnic lunch and then we went Go-Karting. I watched the kids go driving racing cars on a track. I was too scared to have a go, but next time I would like to have a go.

In the morning we went to a wildlife park. We saw monkeys and cockatoos and they were funny. We went on a bus around the park. I liked the bus, it was fun. We went into a nocturnal house where we saw bats and possums and snakes, owls and spiders. I liked the sugar gliders that were hanging up-side-down. We went into an aquarium and we saw a stingray. I thought the stingray was going to bite me! We saw fishes swimming above us and lots of pretty little fish that looked like dalmations and one that looked like Nemo. We had a picnic lunch there and a wallaby came and ate my food. Naughty wallaby! In the afternoon we went to a waterslide park. I swam with Sharbs and Joel wanted me to go on the waterslide but I didn't want to go on it because it was a bit high. I cheered for the kids as they were coming down. Ben, Destin, Sharbs, Claire-Louise, Rebecca, Joel and mum were really brave. I hurt my knuckles on the end of the pool and I cried a lot because it really hurt.

The next day we went on a crocodile cruise on the Adelaide River. We were in a boat with a big glass window so we could see the crocodiles. I saw a man

hanging a steak over the side of the boat and the crocodile jumped up out of the water and ate the meat. We went to didgeridoo hut where we saw a cockatoo that was making a lot of noise and even ate Ben's phone because he was fiddling with it. We went to Crocodyllus Park and we saw lots and lots of crocodiles. I even held a crocodile! We saw a crocodile asleep with its mouth open. After that we went to feed some fish at the sea life centre and mum bought me a hat. On the way home I sat in the front of the bus with Nell and Neville. They were like my grandparents and I liked them a lot. Neville kept teasing me.

On Friday we did craft activities. It was Mathew's birthday so we had a party and I ate pizza and drank lemonade. At the end of the party we had a talent quest. Russell was being a girl and Mahima did an Indian dance. I liked it and I would like to dance like that with an Indian costume. I liked the music too. After that the Variety people gave us certificates and gifts.

The next day we packed up our things and said goodbye to everyone. Ben, Joel, Kelly, Jackie, Rebecca, Denise, Jim, Neville, Nell and lots of other people gave me a big cuddle. They all got on the bus and Mum and I went to Natalie's house in Darwin. Natalie had a dog called Cobber who was a cute little dog and a cat called Mischka. We went to an Italian restaurant for tea and I had ravioli. Then we went to the airport and caught the plane home. When we got off the plane it was very cold.

Stories from the Field is enjoyed by many members. It is an opportunity to share strategies and experiences that others may find informative and inspiring.

Please forward your stories to editor@autismtas.org.au or mail to The Editor, PO Box 1552 Launceston.

Jeremy's new Car

This story has been contributed by Carolyn Geard, Jeremy's Mum. Jeremy has just turned nineteen. He was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome at seven years of age. He has had several years of ABA (Applied Behavioural Analysis therapy)

Jeremy turned sixteen in the August of 2005, at which age you can obtain your learner's licence. He didn't show much enthusiasm for this which I didn't mind as I think sixteen is a bit too young to learn to drive.

Jeremy's seventeenth birthday came and went and he was still not that interested in learning to drive. Then towards late 2007, after he turned eighteen, Jeremy began scanning the papers for his favourite car, "a Volvo". Not just any Volvo, it had to be a specific model, that being an 850 model.

Jeremy had decided he wanted to drive an automatic, which I thought was a good idea. Less stress with not having to worry about gear changes. Also we are a one car family with a 4WD Patrol and Jeremy was not keen on learning to drive such a big vehicle, plus it was a manual.

The new year began in 2008 with Jeremy showing more interest in obtaining his learners licence. So we read the road rule book together and discussed the rules and Jeremy was ready to sit his learner's test. After three failures, Jeremy was becoming frustrated with the idea of getting his licence, but on the fourth attempt he came out with a big smile on his face and our challenge was just about to begin.

Now Jeremy had his learners licence, it was in earnest that he find himself a "Volvo" to drive. Every weekend was spent scanning the cars guide in the Mercury. "There's one" he said, and "it's my favourite colour too", blue", so I said to Jeremy ring up and find out the details, which he did. A few days later we went and took it for a test drive. Jeremy thought I was okay but unfortunately it would have required some work and it was not to be the car for Jeremy. There's a lesson in that, it might be the first car



Jeremy with his new car.

you look at and think it's okay, but it is probably not the best one to buy, as there will always be something else to come available and there was.

However, as there aren't many Volvo's available for sale in Tasmania, Dad decided to check out the internet. Plenty to choose from interstate, but deciding which would be the best one could be difficult. However Nigel (Dad) is pretty good when it comes to finding the best one in the bunch, There it was, a burgundy Volvo 850SE Auto, in a car yard in Sydney, that deals in European cars. Jeremy checked it out on the internet site and gave it his seal of approval. Nigel rang the car yard and discussed details, as it was a big risk buying a vehicle from interstate as you couldn't take it for a test run until you arrived in Sydney. The car dealer was very accommodating and understanding.

So our adventure began in the early hours of a Saturday morning in April. Off to the airport to catch a 6am plane to Sydney. You can do these things now as flights are so cheap. We arrived on a sunny Sydney morning at 8.30am, took a taxi to the car yard and had our first glimpse of what was to be Jeremy's first car. We were quite impressed with the quality of the vehicle. A 1996 model which has features of leather interior and a wood grain dash which Jeremy really likes, ABS brakes, A/C, power windows, alloy wheels, airbags and of course every young man's car has a CD player. It also has low kilometres which was a big attraction for Nigel. We took it for a test

run, just around a few blocks, not very far as we weren't very familiar with the streets in Sydney. Time for Jeremy to sign on the dotted line and hand over the cash, something he was not keen on parting with, but he was very happy with his purchase. Now to find our way out of Sydney.

It wasn't too hard, as Nigel was driving and Jeremy was in the front passenger seat, most annoyed though because he couldn't drive his new vehicle. Yours truly was delegated to the back seat, doing the GPS thing and cruising down the Hume Highway happily taking snaps on the way. We called into Goulburn for a lunch/fuel stop, then I took over the driving for a while. Not being used to European cars where the instrument panel i.e. wipers, indicators etc are on the opposite side to Australian cars, so every time I indicated, the wipers came on causing laughter to erupt in the car. It's a pretty long haul from Sydney to Melbourne in one day (950 Kms) hence having two drivers to share the trip. The Volvo was purring along beautifully.

We arrived in Melbourne at approximately 8pm that evening. We went to Rex Hunt's Fish D'licious because Jeremy loves fish. We were all getting tired by this stage as it had been a long day, but it was going to be an even LONGER night.

So we headed off to find our accommodation that Nigel had booked in St Kilda. We wanted somewhere close by to have easy access to the ferry terminal in the morning but he was unaware that the motel was in the street where all the nightclubs are. Luckily we were able to park the Volvo in a lockable compound where it was safe and secure. We had to

run the gauntlet past the noisy crowd of young people to get to the motel where we were staying, our room was upstairs and not far away from one of the noisy nightclubs. Luckily for us Jeremy was tired and didn't take long to get to sleep, however it was a different story for us. All night you could hear the "boom, boom, boom" emanating through the walls, not to mention the *kitchen music*, which is what it sounded like. Pots, pans, glass jars being banged and tapped together out on the street and to make matters worse, daylight saving ended that night which meant the revellers had another hour to party and fight, keeping us awake. Finally dawn arrived and the streets were quiet as we made our way to the Ferry Terminal and boarded the Spirit of Tasmania.

This was a day sailing and as the sun was setting for another day we arrived in Devonport. We hit the road to Hobart and were glad to be home later that night after a long journey.

Jeremy began his driving lessons in our spare paddock, creating a dusty dirt track around the perimeter. He then progressed to driving around our local area. On his fourth time out on the road he drove to Lachlan in the Derwent Valley at night, he was keen to do this and did very well. Jeremy has over forty hours driving experience now and he thoroughly enjoys driving. He finds it relaxing and I never seem to get to drive much any more. He will sit his provisional test in mid October.

So watch out for a burgundy Volvo 850SE when you are out on the road, it just could be Jezza!



Former President Penny Cromarty & Vice President Dr Andrew Davies receive a cheque from the Rio Tinto Alcan Grant Committee to establish an Asperger's support group in Launceston.

Donation Thanks

To Cathie Gaffney and the QANTAS staff at the Hobart Contact Centre for their donation from snack sales.

Raffle Success

The ***Hit Autism for Six!!!*** Raffle ran earlier this year was won by Haylee McCulloch of Somerset, although maybe her Dad, Bevan, would rather have won the cricket bat himself! They have settled on a compromise by hanging the case in the family lounge room where all can admire it. The autographed shirt was won by Barb Stewart of Austin's Ferry.

A big ***thankyou*** to all members who took a book/books of tickets to sell. The raffle was run within a fairly tight time-frame and as the cricket season had finished for the year, it was a big ask. We thank you for your support and together we managed to raise over \$3,000 for Autism Tasmania.

Congratulations on a fantastic effort everyone!



Bevan and Haylee McCulloch of Somerset with their prize.

Welcome to New Members

Welcome to all our new members and thank you to everyone who has renewed their membership for 2008.

Jamie and Peta Sheehan
Wendy Daft
Angela Northcott
Felicity Brown
Elinor Cox
Sonja Johnson
Ruth Treloggen
Christopher Rayner
Donna Rayner
Roz Curren
Leanne Roberts
St Leonards Primary School
Mandee Hudson
Steve Pike
Annette Aichberger
Rosemary and Daniel Ford
Melinda and Damien Ridley
Peta Kelty
Pakinee Hingston
Gary and Tamara Trout
Tanya Broad
Andrew & Marissa Barry
Renaë Barnett
Patricia Wilson
Allan & Amelia Kenny
Clinton and Lisa Rowe
Karen Brown
Kaylee Nash Rawnsley
Jason Parie

Garry Goodrich
Tania Gordon
Darlene Mclennan
Sharon Davidson
Jodie Fuller
Jeffrey and Meredith Phillips
Maree Morgan
Michelle Nissen
Brett Harrison
Natasha Petrie
Karen Jenkinson
Daniel Thomas
Jacqueline Reid
Catherine Joyce Sullivan
Marilyn Crack
Sarah Sparks and Adrian Birkett
Arezoo Khadembashi
TLC Psychology [Mickaela Schelleman]
Phillip and Leonie Crowden
Heather Cooper
Kathryn Harth
Judy and Phillip Cornwell
Samone Hooper
Jason and Jodie Boucher
Malcolm and Daniel Bywaters
Martin & Mary Bennett
Ben Gardner

Thank you also to the many people who generously made a donation to Autism Tasmania with their membership renewal.

Around the State

Featuring Circular Head Parent Support



Our group is presently made up of seven mums and one grandma. Our homes are scattered all over the region of Circular Head, but we meet in Smithton at the Rural Health Centre every third Friday, then wander across the street to enjoy lunch together.

Each of us has a child who is on the Autism spectrum and it's really satisfying to be able to get together and discuss our 'different' parenting journeys with others who understand exactly where you're coming from, as well as the ongoing challenges both we and our children face at the various stages throughout home life, schooling and navigating the social realm. When Rose Clark travels to meet with us, we enjoy the opportunity to borrow from the travelling library and will sometimes watch and discuss a DVD together or otherwise discuss information Rose will have provided on various topics of interest to us all.

While having lunch after a get-together recently, the MP for Braddon, Sid Sidebottom walked into the café and sat at a table near us. One cheekier member of our group, fortified by a glass of chardonnay, walked straight up to him and said that we would like a word. After some conversation, during which his lunch was rapidly cooling, he suggested that we meet with him at a later date to talk properly.

With help from Rose Clark (Family Support Co-ordinator), we organised a meeting for the next time Sid came to Smithton. We met at Rural Health as we felt that would be more private, and had food sent over to us so we could have lunch and talk at the same time. Five of our group met with Sid and his assistant Luke Sayer for an informal, laidback discussion about what living with Autism is really like and the issues we deal with on an ongoing basis.

We were given almost two hours of their time, each of us describing our own situation and where we were at. Both Sid and Luke listened actively, asking us questions as we spoke about our lives and our children. Both commented that hearing such information first-hand was so much more real than anything they might read in a report full of statistics on Autism.

If you would like to share what is happening in your area, please email editor@autismtas.org.au or send your contribution to The Editor, Po Box 1552 Launceston, Tas 7250.

'Autism News' is produced four times each year by a volunteer team led by Editor, Ros Ward.

We welcome contributions from members on the many experiences and perspectives of the autism and Asperger's journey. Please send to editor@autismtas.org.au

For commercial advertising, please use the general enquiries contact on the back page.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in 'Autism News' and any enclosures are not necessarily those of Autism Tasmania Inc. Information is presented in the interests of providing a range of ideas and options for discussion and consideration. It does not imply endorsement by Autism Tasmania Inc.

As you are reading this newsletter, you either have an ASD, are the parent/relative or carer of someone with an ASD, or you are a professional who works with someone on the spectrum. We all need to look after ourselves and to find ways of managing the stresses of life. Tony Attwood has Tai Chi on his list of recommended strategies for regaining emotional equilibrium and for management of stress. If this article interests you, you might choose to consider adding Tai Chi to your 'coping toolbox'.

Tai Chi is the practise of moving meditation where gentle physical movement, deep abdominal breathing and mental visualisation of peaceful, positive scenes are combined to have a holistic effect on one's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.

The Eastern philosophy behind Tai Chi is that:

- ❖ much as water and air must flow to prevent stagnation, so too, it is beneficial for the energy field within and surrounding our bodies to move and flow regularly to prevent stagnation of our energy which can manifest as physical unwell-ness, mental stress and anxiety or emotional stress and depression.
- ❖ just as regular meals and a balanced diet are beneficial for us physically, it is of equal benefit to maintain and restore balance to our energy fields.

There are heaps of different types of Tai Chi, ranging from quite simple and repetitive, to very intricate with as many as one hundred different movements and the use of fans or swords as props

One of the simpler types is called Qigong (pronounced kee/gong) and is made up of eighteen gentle, repetitive movements that flow into each other, with a visualisation to go with each that has been taken from nature such as 'paint the rainbow', 'scooping the sea' or 'rushing wave'. You still your mind before beginning practise, emptying it

of conscious thought (which proved to be one of the hardest parts for me to master). You focus your sight on a candle flame if practising inside or a plant in the garden when outside and concentrate only on your breathing.

Once your mind is still, you begin to go through the movements and to visualise the scene for each one. For the twenty minutes it takes to go through all eighteen movements, your mind is taken away from your everyday worries and is centred on peaceful, calming thoughts. Every muscle, joint and tendon in your body receives a gentle yet thorough workout.

Each of the movements contains a balance of:

- ❖ deep breathe in / deep breathe out
- ❖ raise the body / lower the body (from the knees, no levitation involved, lol!)
- ❖ advance forwards / retreat backwards
- ❖ shift to the left / centre / shift to the right / back to centre

Qigong lessons are often advertised in Adult Education catalogues, you may have seen it in there and not known what it was. I can highly recommend it as it is one of the most important items in my 'coping toolbox'.

Fourteen years ago I learned how to practise Qigong through Adult Ed. in Gladstone, Qld. The course consisted of six lessons for two hours a week and I paid sixty dollars for them which I consider one of the best investments of time and money I have ever made. I practiced daily and before long, became hooked.

I later moved to Brisbane where I attended a weekend workshop with Master Gary Khor, founder of the Australian Academy of Tai Chi in Brisbane and Sydney. Master Khor has written several books, one of which is "Tai Chi for Stress Control / The Key to Dynamic Wellness". This book includes explanation of the eighteen Qigong movements with illustrations, as well as the theory behind the movements.

“Going to the Dentist– Dental Treatment for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders”

If you would like the more detailed version of strategies presented from the package ***“Going to the Dentist– Dental Treatment for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders”*** please contact Gwen Waters (details below)

These ideas were put together originally as a training package presented to Dental Therapists who deal with children with Autism, who are often very fearful of having their teeth even checked, let alone treated. The strategies that are outlined will be useful also for those with communication, intellectual, social or sensory impairments.

Familiarization

Get the dentist into the class to talk about dental care and get to know the children and then have the class and child visit the clinic when they can show and explain procedures and instruments.

Desensitization

Introduce the item or procedure at a low key level first i.e. count fingernails before teeth with the probe and allow ‘play’ with the item that is likely to cause the biggest problem. Practice reactions that you need i.e. mouth open wide.

Blockers

Ear muffs to reduce noise, music to soothe, sun glasses to reduce glare from lights, essential oils to mask antiseptic smells and a stress ball to keep hands occupied.



Visual Strategies

Visuals help the child to become familiar with the environment and procedures i.e. this is what the dentist will look like with their mask, glasses and gloves on; aid understanding when communication is poor – a photo of the probe on a tooth is better than trying to explain it; and schedules let the child know what is happening next and helps them to prepare and plan i.e. waiting room, sit on chair, open mouth, count teeth.



Social Stories

Social stories help to explain social situations, what will happen, how the child might feel and how they should react.

Rehearsal

You may need to rehearse the visit to the dentist many times before what you need to do is achieved. Remember if you change anything regarding personnel, procedures or equipment you need to pre warn the child.

Gwen Waters—Student Support and Disability Services

64 Commercial St West
Mt Gambier South Australia 5290
E-mail: waters.gwen@saugov.sa.gov.au

This article was forwarded to Rose from Felicity Lovatt, a speech pathologist on the North West coast.

Inside the back page

East Coast Parent Group Grant

The East Coast Parent Group recently received a Tasmanian Community Support Levy grant of \$2,727 for its *Action for Autism* project. Group spokesperson, Karen Rawnsley explained that the group decided on a very practical approach to helping several young children by bringing PECS specialist, Amanda Reid of Pyramid Educational Consultants to the region, coinciding with her visit to Tasmania to run workshops.

Amanda worked directly with three children at St Marys Primary School, as well as meeting with their teachers, aides and parents.

Temple Grandin Award

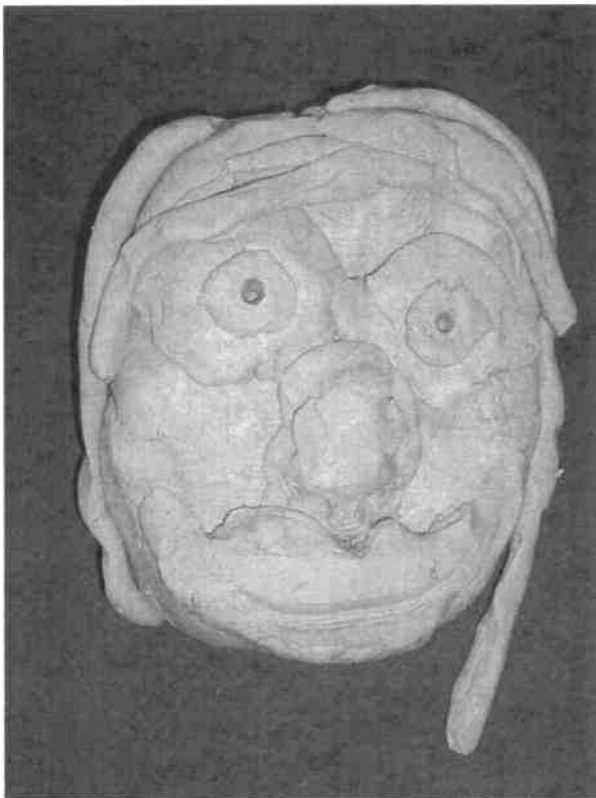
In November 2007 Mr Lachlan Wright, Head of Scotch Oakburn College Junior School Launceston, was awarded the prestigious Carol Gray Award for his outstanding contribution to the education of students with autism spectrum disorder.

The award is given in the name of Ms. Gray to recognize over 25 years of outstanding efforts both in her home school district of Jenison, Michigan, USA and in her communications to parents and teachers all over the world.

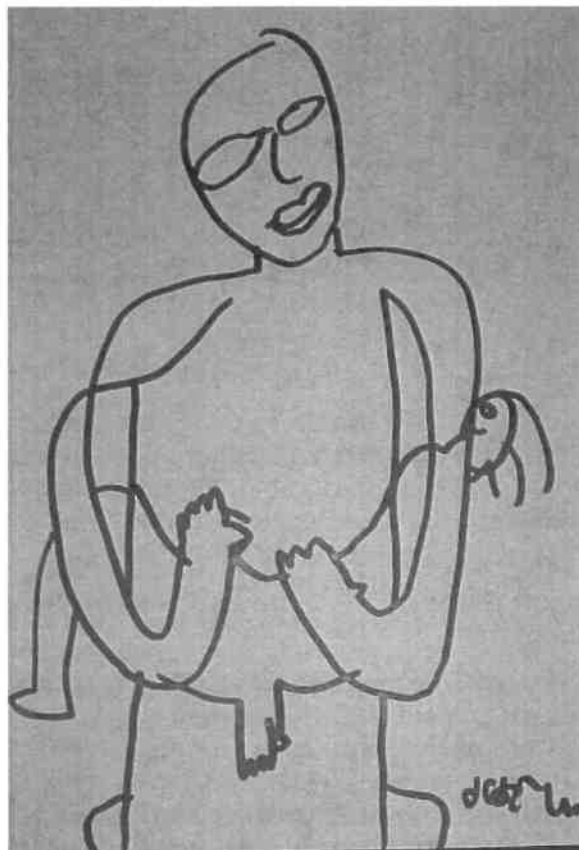
Further examples of Art Work

by

Access Arts Link Junior Artist Program



A self portrait in clay



Boy carrying girl



*Information & Support
Training & Consultancy*

Contact ~ Rose Clark

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Newsletter

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Regional Support Groups Meeting Regularly

<u>Area</u>	<u>Meeting Location</u>	<u>Date & Time</u>
Circular Head	Rural Health Centre Emmett Street, Smithton	Usually 3 rd Wed each month 10.30 – 12pm <i>Call Carolyn Moore - 6458 2096</i>
George Town	Wattle Building Agnes Street, George Town	Last Wed each month 7 – 9pm <i>Contact Rose Clark</i>
Launceston (includes Lilydale/Exeter)	St Giles Amy Road, Launceston	<i>Contact Rose Clark</i>
Hobart	Tascare 231 Main Road, Moonah	2 nd Thurs each month 7.30 – 9.30pm <i>Contact Rose Clark</i>
Asperger's Syndrome Support Group [Hobart]	Tascare 231 Main Road, Moonah	Last Sunday each month 2 – 4pm <i>Contact Rose Clark</i>
Asperger's Syndrome Support Group [Launceston]	St Vincent de Paul Invermay Road, Invermay	1st Sat each month 1.30 - 3.30pm <i>Contact Rose Clark</i>
Huon Valley	Alternate between Huonville and Geeveston	Last Monday in the month 10 .00 - 12.00pm <i>Contact Rose Clark</i>

Autism support groups also meet in Cressy and on the East Coast. Some individual schools also offer parents the opportunity to meet. Contact Rose or the Support Teacher at your child's school for further information.