



AUTISM NEWS

Newsletter of Autism Tasmania Inc.

Postal Address

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Australia

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

I am sure you will find this newsletter full of interesting and useful articles. Thankyou to all those who have made contributions to this issue.

Much has happened since our last newsletter in June. The National Autism conference in Hobart was a great success with more than 500 delegates attending. We were very fortunate in having the Governor of Tasmania, Sir Guy Green to officially open the conference. His address was very informed and eloquent and his comments were very pertinent to Tasmania. The Conference certainly put Autism Spectrum under the spotlight with good media coverage over the three days.

Two days after the Conference, the Minister for Education, Ms Paula Wriedt announced a forum into the provision of Autism services in this state! (see details in this issue)

Conference delegates were treated to a display of very fine artwork produced by people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder and our thanks go to all those who helped in any way with the Art Exhibition. Many people commented on the talent of the artists. There was a huge variety of work and they were certainly very eye-catching. We are looking at other venues for a future exhibition.

Much new and interesting information on Autism Spectrum Disorder is being released and as it comes to light, we will endeavour to get it you as quickly as possible. You will see in this newsletter information on gluten-free foods, Irlen lenses and new books and videos ordered for our library. All members can access our library free of charge.

Autism Tasmania's Annual General Meeting will be taking place in Ross on September 18th at 11:30. We hope to see as many of you there as possible. As the life of this committee draws to a close; - several people are not re-nominating - I would like to take the opportunity to thank each and every person on the committee for their dedication and hard work in helping to raise the profile of Autism Spectrum Disorder in this state.

Rose Clark President

Outgoing Committee Members

President	Rose Clark	6423 1086
Vice President	Kathy Gill	6223 7175
Secretary	Rachel Hodge	6393 7183
Treasurer	Roseanne Lay	6244 2540
Committee Members	Lisa Minchin Cheryl Scott	6223 2317 6344 8015

AUTISM TASMANIA INFORMATION KIT

Autism Tasmania has produced a Parent Information Kit. This extensive collection of information has been collated over the past 18 months.

Included in the folder is information on: Diagnostic Criteria, Assessment Agencies, Helpful Hints, Siblings' Rights and Needs, Family Stories, Intervention Services and Programs, and Sources of Information plus many more interesting and valuable articles.

This document is a valuable resource for both parents and professionals. The pages are in an A4 ring binder which allows information to be added or deleted as necessary.

The kits are available from Autism Tasmania @
\$10.00 plus \$2.00 pp for Parents
\$15.00 plus \$2.00 pp for Professionals

Make cheques payable to Autism Tasmania Inc and send to PO Box 1552 Launceston with your details ie parent/professional and postal address.

Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in this Newsletter are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the views of Autism Tasmania Inc.

Any mention of products or treatments does not constitute an endorsement.

The Editor reserves the right to follow normal sub-editing procedure.

SUE BETTISON SEMINAR

In June this year, members of Autism Tasmania were fortunate to have access to the skills and knowledge of Sue Bettison on the subject of toilet training for 2 full day workshops - one in Launceston and the other in Hobart.

During this visit, she also conducted another full-day workshop in Deloraine for professionals dealing with autism, which was also well attended. Clearly this is an area that parents and professionals have felt a need for information and guidance.

Sue's credentials in this area are impeccable and her confident style of presentation firmly laid to rest many of the myths of bladder and bowel control eg "No drinks after 4 pm to ensure a dry night". Sue's Training pants are an essential part of her program and Autism Tasmania is planning to buy several pairs which will be available for members to hire.

Her understanding of the development of bladder and bowel control and her ability to break down this sequence into manageable training steps, has made her a valuable resource person to many parents of disabled children; especially children with an ASD.

She convinced many parents, who may have thought that toilet training their child was impossible, that it is possible to toilet train just about anyone - and that once trained, the quality of life (for the whole family) improves enormously!

This workshop inspired parents to tackle toilet training equipped with confidence and a sound knowledge base. I felt that we all gained valuable and practical information that could be immediately applied

Cheryl Scott

Autism News

Contributions are always welcome for Autism News. The deadline for the next issue is November 26th 1999

Cheryl Scott Editor

GLUTEN FREE FOOD

As a result of the very successful "Toilet Training" workshops with Sue Bettison, many parents requested information on diet and the presence of gluten, casein and additives in food.

Comprehensive lists of foods which are gluten free are available through "The Coeliac Society of Australia Inc - Tas Branch" PO Box 159 Launceston 7250 ph 6344 4279

Another source of valuable information is contained in "Friendly Food" published by the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital and readily available from good bookshops.

It is a good book outlining diet details for all types of allergies and intolerances and has a wide range of recipes.

(My copy cost \$9.95 from a Devonport bookshop earlier this year (Rose Clark).

Another useful book is called 'Special Diets for Special Kids by L Lewis. Written by a parent this book provides a great deal of information for understanding and implementing a gluten and casein-free diet, to aid in the treatment of autism and delayed developmental disorders. It includes over 150 recipes

Rose Clark

Available from Autism Tasmania

Autism Tasmania Information Kit See page 2

Alert Cards \$1.00 for 20

Gold Lapel Pins \$3.00 + \$1.50pp

Don't forget our library - check this issue for new books!!!

Available in the:	North	6334 2843
	North West	6442 4079
	South	6244 2540

Conference Proceedings and Key note
Speakers Papers see page 6

FEATURE ARTICLE

DIET AND BEHAVIOUR IN CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

A number of families is concerned about their autistic child's faddish and/or severely restricted diet. Amanda Richdale and Jacqueline Novacek, Dept of Psychology and Intellectual Disability Studies, RMIT University, felt that the following short research report may be of interest to readers.

The issue of diet and its relationship in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders has been a topic that continues to reappear in the popular media and on autism lists on the web. However, it is our belief that there is still no good evidence to suggest that special diets will 'cure' autism. It may well be that for specific children, certain dietary factors exacerbate behavioural symptoms, but to determine this, parents would need to carefully control their child's diet under the guidance of a paediatric dietitian who had some knowledge of Autism Spectrum Disorders. In terms of research, there is just too little sound research to reliably determine fact from fiction.

Nevertheless, given the current upsurge in interest in dietary interventions being widely discussed it may be timely to provide a brief report on a controlled study into diet and behaviour in children with autism. Jacqueline Navacek conducted this study for her Master's degree in Psychology at RMIT University a few years ago. The results of this study were reported at the *New Insights into Autism* conference at Monash Medical Centre in 1996.

Sixteen children with autism aged from 5-11 years and 15 typically developing children aged from 6 to 10 years participated in the study. Parents of these children answered questions concerning their child's diet and eating habits, completed a behaviour checklist, and kept a measured food diary for all meals and snacks over a 14 day period.

Consistent with previous reports of the eating habits of children with autism, these children were reported to have more food fads and cravings, avoid foods with certain textures, eat excessively, and display more unusual behaviours than the comparison children. Parents of children with autism also tended to believe that diet affected their child's behaviour. Many of the children with autism had restricted diets.

The food records from the diary were analysed for nutrient content and in general, all children tended to consume more than the recommended daily amounts of nutrients. Overall the two groups of children did not differ in their intake of proteins, carbohydrates, or other nutrients except that the comparison children had more mono-unsaturated fats in their diet. There were some relationships between diet and behaviour for both groups of children, but the nature of these relationships differed and was not easily interpreted. The main conclusions that we drew from this work were:

- 1 Despite their often restricted and odd diet, children with autism generally had a nutritionally adequate diet,
- 2 Diet did not generally seem to relate to behaviour, and
- 3 Food preferences and odd diets in children with autism were related to the sensory properties of food such as texture, smell and appearance.

Of course that is not the last word regarding the question of diet and behaviour in children with autism, but it suggests that in general there is no reason to believe that the two are related. It seems that diet fads in children with autism are most likely related to the sensory properties of food. Detailed and controlled biochemical and nutritional studies are still needed to determine whether or not there is any reliable relationship between diet and behaviour for some subgroup of children with autism.

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We're on the Net!

Autism Tas

AUTISM TAS IS ON THE NET

Our address is

www.autismtas.org.au

If you haven't done so already, visit Autism Tasmania's website! It's well worth a look.. Many thanks to Neil Lay for all his work in setting up this site.

DIFFICULT BEHAVIOUR –some possible causes to consider

To change behaviour, we need to understand why it is occurring and what is sustaining its continuation. Often, to change behaviour, we have to modify what we do as well as the environments in which we interact and teach. The following is an overview of common problem areas which give rise to difficult behaviour – in both children and adults.

ILLNESS

It is always wise to consider medical reasons where there is unexplained deterioration in behaviour. Where the person is non-verbal, they cannot tell you about headaches, toothaches or other illness. With the verbal person, while they have the vocabulary, they cannot always initiate telling you about their illness.

FATIGUE

Is the person tired? Has the person slept well the night before? Does the behaviour occur at the same time each day? If you think the behaviour is consistently related to tiredness, make sure that taxing work is carried out earlier in the day and you plan a less demanding activity for those time-related difficult periods.

HUNGER

Is there a pattern related to meal times? Does the person become more difficult before lunch or around mid morning? Has the person a means to communicate hunger, thirst? If the person has language, can they initiate telling you they are hungry? Make sure there are communication systems in place (Compic, photos or routines) which assist the person to communicate their needs.

COMPLEXITY OF THE TASK

Are the tasks too advanced? Has the person been taught appropriately, that is, has the task been broken into achievable steps? Is the person frightened of a negative reaction when he fails, so seeks to avoid the task altogether?

APPROACH

Is the behaviour more likely to occur with a particular person? Identify what makes this person's approach different from others and ensure a positive change.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Is the environment overstimulating, for example, for example, busy, noisy, intrusive, crowded (supermarkets, sports day etc)? Do not demand that the individual spends long periods in these situations. Build their tolerance

gradually from short periods to longer periods. With some individuals, especially older people, it may be best to avoid these situations altogether whenever possible.

FEAR OF CHANGE

Does the person have a system which visually tells him about change and the things that are to happen next? Remember, the person with autism makes sense of the world through routine. Without some method of preparing the person for change, in advance, the person may find change very stressful. Some people may be taught to use written timetables; others will use Compic/photos and others may need an object associated with the activity which is about to happen, for example: paint brushes to carry from class to the craft room. This will let him know, in advance, where he is going and what is to happen next.

DURATION OF ACTIVITY

Does the person become agitated (restless self talk, tearful, anxious) as the day progresses? Consider giving the person short, planned, pro-active respite breaks. Build these breaks into a routine schedule. After an intense or busy period, plan down time when he can calm down. In the case of school, this might be a corner in the classroom with a beanbag, books or objects he likes to manipulate, and where he can have time without intrusion from others. The corner can be incorporated into the general class routine, with other children also having a turn in this teacher-free zone.

UNDERSTIMULATION

Are the tasks too simple? Is he constantly having to repeat the task with the same materials? Is the work being made motivating? Is there a system in place which allows the person to know what is expected, when the work is finished and how to go on to a new task?

COMMUNICATION

Does the person have a means of having his needs met? Has the person been taught to use a communication system which allows him to say "I'm hungry", "I want a drink", "I'm tired", "I need help"? Does the person have any communication system, other than his behaviour, to say "No"? Providing the person with a communication system and teaching him to use it, is of primary importance, not just in terms of behaviour management, but also in terms of the person's human needs and dignity. **Remember, the behaviour is the communication of last resort for people unable to communicate their needs in any other way.**

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NATIONAL AUTISM CONFERENCE

AUTISM TASMANIA Inc.
would like to sincerely thank

Australian Paper

&

**The Department of Family
 and Community Services**

**for their very generous support
 of**

**The National Autism Conference
 Hobart, Tasmania 1999**

CONFERENCE PAPERS AND EVALUATIONS

The conference committee would like to thank those people who attended and took the time to complete an evaluation form. The results of these will be passed onto South Australia to help them in planning the next National Conference in 2001 in Adelaide.

It was most unfortunate that several papers presented at the Conference were unable to be included in the Proceedings package which was given to each delegate. Those few papers not printed (with one exception) had not been forwarded by the printing deadline and therefore were not in the proceedings

Comments were made by some regarding papers presented. The committee was aware of the lack of papers available in relation to those lower functioning people with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Papers in this area were not forthcoming in the "Call for Papers". It is an area that the South Australians will be made aware of and we hope one they will be able to address, so that the whole spectrum is covered. Rose Clark

THE 1999 NATIONAL AUTISM CONFERENCE HOBART A parent's personal reflections by Corry Vakintis

As a parent of a child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder being able to attend the recent Autism Conference was both enlightening and motivating. Our daughter, who is 4 years old and has mild/moderate Autism was diagnosed in August 1998 and since then, our family has been on a very steep learning curve regarding all issues related to Autism. It has been my first Autism conference and will probably remain my most memorable for that reason and I look forward to attending many more.

From Carol Gray's wonderful opening speech on Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations through to closing address and panel discussion I watched and listened avidly. So many presentations; each filled with such a diversity of information from people of all disciplines, who had come together to share their speciality knowledge with all those involved in some way or another with Autism Spectrum Disorder. I suppose we were all really there to share information, learn as much as possible - as well as share personal life experiences; in order to assist and support children and adults with an ASD and Asperger's realise their full potential in every aspect of life.

I found Carol Gray's presentation on Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations both informative, lively and giving great insight into the importance of teaching social skills in a very accurate, though simple format of both pictures and text. The aim of Social Stories being to share accurate and concrete information, enabling the reader to better understand the intrinsic foundations of social communication (verbal and non-verbal), as well as more abstract concepts surrounding socialisation skills that are not readily taught in school curriculums.

Wendy Lawson remains one of my favourite speakers to listen to and I admire her for the way in which she explains the enigma of Autism with such clarity, honesty and a witty sense of humour through her own personal perspective as an autistic person. Wendy never fails to give her audience a deeper insight into Autism from an inside-out perspective, which is always so beautifully complemented by her poetry. She also gives us the

(Continued from page 6)

tools to re-address and change our own patterns of thinking and our behaviours; in order to bring about positive outcomes for the people we are so wanting to help reach their full potential.

As for Tony Attwood's presentations and co-presentation, both were just brilliant and I don't think he lost the audience full attention for even a moment. As usual, Tony was fast paced, informative full of enthusiasm - a real mixture of professional expertise, knowledge and many years of practical experience. Tony kept the audience both captivated and smiling throughout.

Paired with Carol Gray for the presentation "Understanding and teaching Friendship Skills," he and Carol gave us a greater awareness and understanding of the intricate developmental processes that take place and are necessary for the development of both social skills and therefore friendship skills. Autistic children often do not have the innate ability to master these skills naturally, and therefore these skills need to be developed and taught in both accurate and easily understood fashion. Social skills are vital and invaluable in successfully developing interpersonal relationships and dealing effectively with everyday life situations. The importance of developing and acquiring these skills will have a huge impact on the individual's quality of life.

Dr. Christopher Gillberg's presentation on recent scientific developments into the study of genetics and specific genes that have been identified and implicated in the case of Autism Spectrum Disorders, was fascinating. Dr. Gillberg suggests that unusual genetic patterns appear in individuals with ASD. It is reasonable to conclude that all of the general population carry defective genes to one extent or another, but it seems that when a particular combination of faulty genes are evident in one individual, the likely result is ASD. As scientific research into Autism and genetics progresses, I'm sure quite a few more interesting facts will come to light and give us perhaps more understanding into what role genetics plays in the development of ASD.

As for presentations given by Dr Lawrence Bartak and Ms Vicki Bitsika, both were informative, interesting and thought provoking. Dr Bartak's overview of current diagnostic assessment tools, their accuracy in determining ASD and Asperger's Syndrome as well as their limitations, was of particular interest to me from a parent's viewpoint. Also, Dr Bartak highlighted the fact that apart from Autism and Asperger's Syn-

drome there may be indeed be additional categories within those two groups that are harder to pinpoint with the use of current diagnostic tests and assessments. Ms Vicki Bitsika's presentation on 'Lack of Control as a Precursor for Behavioural Problems for those with an ASD' gave us an important insight into how having a lack of control in all aspects of one's life can create enormous and undue stress therefore resulting in challenging and negative behaviours. This situation is easily compared with that of everyday individuals (neuro-typicals) within society who have little or no control over certain situations, which can result in increased personal stress levels. If coping mechanisms are limited in both cases, the result can easily be defined by aggressive/ challenging behaviours, physical illness and emotional disturbances. If the person also has an ASD, it is reasonable to suggest that the resulting behaviours can be even more complicated.

As for all the concurrent sessions and diversity of topics and ensuing issues covered, I found the ones I attended really interesting. I would have liked to sit in on all of them but this was physically impossible, so I'll just have to be content to read about the ones I missed. Sometimes the topics being discussed were extremely thought provoking and a little controversial, sparking both heightened interest and questions from the audience. Other sessions were just too short to cover the vast wealth of knowledge and expertise the speakers had to offer and sometimes the issues discussed tugged at the heart strings and brought tears to my eyes, as I struggled to remain composed. The conference personally gave me a wonderful opportunity to learn more about ASD from such a diversity of *Continued on page 12)*

AVAILABLE FROM THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE

There are limited copies available of :
Proceedings of the Conference \$10.00
Keynote Speakers Papers \$5.00
Program and Abstracts \$5.00

Tapes of Keynote speakers are available

Use the order form in this newsletter, but
 put in your order NOW

1999 NATIONAL AUTISM CONFERENCE

by Louise Vernieux

The 1999 National Autism Conference was held at the Wrest Point Convention Centre in mid August, and I, along with many of the Early intervention Team enthusiastically went along. As many of our clients have an Autism Spectrum Disorder, we were all keen to gain as much knowledge as possible from the speakers, and we were not disappointed. Rarely, has a conference had so many eloquent and knowledgeable speakers.

The first day of the conference began with an address by Carol Gray, who talked about the use of social stories with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. She works with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder in the public school system in Michigan USA, and she used her wealth of experience and her deep respect for these children to provide a very clear, practical, and heart-felt look at how we can best help children with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Asperger's Syndrome interact with other people.

Carol was followed by Wendy Lawson, a woman who has Asperger's Syndrome, who regularly presents at conferences and workshops. She was able to talk about Asperger's and Autism in a way that made us all feel as if we could really understand how difficult it was for them. She emphasized how people with Autism Spectrum Disorder take things very literally, usually think in pictures rather than in words, and have difficulty forgetting things, so that they respond to past experiences with as much emotion as if it happened a few seconds ago. She reminded us that we have to be careful how we communicate with people with Autism Spectrum Disorder; for example, if you say, "The bus is running on time," rather than understanding the bus is late, a person with Autism Spectrum Disorder pictures a bus with legs running across a clock face, and they have no idea what is meant by the statement. Wendy was followed by Vicki Bitsika, a psychologist who discussed the idea that people with Autism Spectrum Disorder have difficulties because they have no control over their situation.

The next day was filled another round of excellent keynote speakers including two lectures by Christopher Gillberg, who seemed to know everything about Autism Spectrum Disorder and then some, (we were sure could ask him a question on physics and he would know the answer!) Most importantly, he was able

to present facts and figures in a way that didn't make you run to the coffee machine in order to stay awake. Lawrence Bartak also presented his experience in diagnosis, and explained all the many disorders and syndromes that can be mistaken for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

The keynote speakers on the last day were in danger of suffering the comparison of their excellent colleagues, however, we soon saw there was no such danger. Tony Attwood began his lecture by addressing the issue of the difference, if any, between high functioning Autism and Asperger's Syndrome. In pointing out that these people had primarily the same problems, he urged his audience to waste little time researching the difference, and more time addressing the needs of these people. This statement was met with a round of knowing applause. He proceeded with his talk in a style that has been perceptively described as a cross between Winnie the Pooh and Tigger, and wowed the audience with his insight and his compassion. Lawrence Bartak also provided us clinicians with very useful information about tests used to diagnose children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Each day, many sessions with different topics were held at the same time, so I have only experienced a portion of what was on offer at the conference. However, the sessions I attended were usually very informative and well presented. Carol Gray and Tony Attwood talked about teaching friendship skills to children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and I attended a session on sleep problems with these children. A talk by Dr Constantine Kotsanis from America about Secretin turned out to be rather disappointing in that he only spent 15 minutes actually talking about Secretin, and could provide isolated anecdotes of its effectiveness. I think this was a disappointment for the many parents who desperately wanted more concrete information about Secretin. Another talk focused on the high number of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, who have co-existing attention deficits, and Janine Manjiviona presented results of study on IQ tests and children with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

But by far and away the most moving talks were given by two groups. Firstly, three people with Asperger's Syndrome, (including Wendy Lawson), gave the audience the chance to ask them anything they wanted, which led to some insights in to how a person with Asperger's experiences life, clinicians and

(Continued on page 14)

It Allows a Portrait in Line-Scan at Fifteen

by Les Murray

It allows a slight 'Martian' accent, from the years of single phrases.

He no longer hugs to disarm. It is gradually allowing him affection.

It does not allow proportion. Distress is absolute, shrieking, and runs him at frantic speed through crashing doors.

He likes cyborgs. Their taciturn power, with his intonation.

It still runs him around the house, alone in the dark cooing and laughing.

He can read about soils, populations and New Zealand. On neutral topics he's illiterate

Arnie Schwarzenegger is an actor. He isn't a cyborg really, is he, Dad?

He lives on forty acres, with animals and trees, and used to draw it continually.

He knows the map of Earth's fertile soils, and can draw it freehand.

He can only lie in a panicked shout *SorrysorryI didn't do it!* Warding off conflict with others and himself.

When he ran away constantly it was to the greengrocers to worship stacked fruit.

His favourite country was the Ukraine; it is nearly all deep fertile soil.

Giggling, he climbed all over the dim Freudian psychiatrist who told us how autism resulted from 'refrigerator' parents.

When asked to smile, he photographs a rictus-smile on his face.

It long forbade all naturalistic films. They were Adult movies.

If they (that is, he) are bad the police will put them in hospital.

He sometimes drew the farm amid Chinese or Balinese rice terraces.

When a runaway, he made uproar in the police station, playing at three times adult speed.

Only animated films were proper. Who Framed Roger Rabbit then authorised the rest.

Phrases spoken to him he would take as teaching and repeat.

When he worshipped fruit, he screamed as if poisoned when it was fed to him.

A one-word first conversation: *Blane - Yes! Plane, that's right, baby! - Blane.*

He has forgotten nothing, and remembers the precise

quality of experiences.

It requires rulings: *Is stealing very playing up, as bad as murder?*

He counts at a glance, not looking. And he has never been lost.

When he ate only nuts and dried fruit, words were for dire emergencies.

He knows all the breeds of fowls, and the counties of Ireland.

He'd begun to talk, then returned to babble, then silence. It withdrew speech for years.

When he took your hand, it was to work it, as a multi-purpose tool.

He is anger's mirror, and magnifies any near him, raging it down.

It still won't allow him fresh fruit, or orange juice with bits in it.

He swam in the midwinter dam at night. It had no rules about cold.

He was terrified of thunder and finally cried as if in explanation *It - angry!*

He grilled an egg he'd broken into bread. Exchanges of soil knowledge are called landtalking.

He lives in objectivity. I was sure Bell's palsy would leave my face only when he said it had begun to.

Don't say word! When he was eight forbade the word 'autistic' in his presence.

Bantering questions about girlfriends cause a terrified look and blocked ears.

He sometimes centred the farm in a furrowed American Midwest.

Eye contact, Mum! Means he truly wants attention. It dislikes I contact.

He is equitable and kind and only ever a little jealous. It was a relief when that little arrived.

He surfs, bowls, walks for mile. For many years he hasn't trailed his left arm while running.

I gotta get smart! Looking terrified into the years. *I gotta get smart*

From New Selected Poems

Published by Duffy and Snellgrove RRP\$19.95

Reproduced with the kind permission of the publishers

Through a chance meeting with author and poet -

Anthony Lawrence - during the Hobart Conference, we were fortunate to hear him read this moving poem on the last day of the conference. It was written by Les Murray about his son. It proved to be a highlight of the conference for many people! Ed

WHAT'S ON!

NORTHERN AUTISM SUPPORT GROUP

There will be an opportunity for parents of social to meet and share experiences at **Walker House, Newnham** on **Thursday, October 14th at 7.30 pm** with a view to making it a regular social event

A video of **Temple Grandin** made at the NZ Autism Conference will be shown.

Please bring a plate to share.
Contact Cheryl Scott for more details 6344 8015



EDUCATION DEPARTMENT INCLUSION REVIEW

We reported in the June edition of this newsletter the up to date details of the review. Since June Autism Tasmania has not received any further information. We will keep you posted as news comes to hand, the review is not expected to be completed until well into 2000

Rose

AUTISM 99 INTERNET CONFERENCE

For information on the Internet conference visit the website: www.autism99.org. Information on the site states that it will be later in '99.

Rose

AUTISM FORUM

On August 17th the Minister for Education, Paula Wriedt, announced a forum into the provision of services for those with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The forum "will involve parents, educators and other interested groups to make recommendations for the long term."

Autism Tasmania issued a media release which stated that the forum should be expanded to include not only education but health and community service issues. The release also noted messages which came from the National Conference:

- positive outcomes are achievable
- early diagnosis and intervention is a key to success
- individuals with lower functioning autism and higher functioning autism have different but significant support needs
- consistency in progress across age and community life is crucial

It concluded with a statement that governments - both State and Federal have to become more active partners and take a realistic and contemporary view of people's needs. The real test will be implementing outcomes identified in the forum rather than talking about them! We will keep you posted!

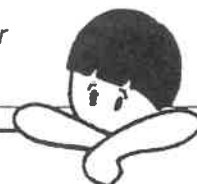
Rose

ASPERGER'S SUPPORT GROUPS IN YOUR REGION

Asperger's Southern Support Group
Contact Roseanne Lay on ph. 6244 2540

Asperger's Northern Support Group
Meetings are held at 1:30pm at Walker House, Newnham on the last Saturday of each month Phone Rachel Hodge 6393 7183 for details

Asperger's North Western Support Group
The next meetings will be held at Leighland's Christian School, Leighland's Ave, Ulverstone on Oct 30th
Contact Eileen Prunster 6445 1696.



GIANT STEPS TASMANIA

In 1998, a highly successful exhibition of art by children with autism was held at Gallery 9 in Deloraine. 49 unique works in many media, beautifully framed and presented, were auctioned – commanding over \$4400 in total from the bedazzled and appreciative audience.

This year should prove even better. *The Design Centre of Tasmania* has generously offered its gallery for the Gala Opening and Auction, and the week-long exhibition to follow. Lady Sally Ferrall will officially open the exhibition. There will be entertainment items by pupils of Giant Steps. Wine and tasty nibbles provided. Don't miss it - WELCOME ONE AND ALL!

Art Auction and Exhibition 1999

WHEN: October 15th Doors open at 7 pm
Programme will commence around 7:45.
All works to be sold at auction on the night,
but to remain on display until October 22.

WHERE: *Design Centre of Tasmania*, corner Brisbane
& Tamar Sts Launceston

COST: \$5.00 donation /adult which
includes a laminated, original art work and
souvenir programme. Entry donations are
refundable against purchases in the
auction.



WHO You and everybody –Be there! :

Nicole Kingston, a Director of ABAKidz will be presenting a seminar on:

New Methods in Behavioural
Intervention for children with Learning
Difficulties

Venue: Early Special Education
Centre Campbell St Hobart

Date: Friday October 15th
9:00- 1:00

Contact Rosemary Rush 6229 5760

FRAGILE X SYNDROME FRAGILE eXpo

The fragile X Alliance Clinic, in conjunction with the Centre for Developmental Disability Health Victoria, presents an all day seminar for health Professionals and Educators providing an overview of Fragile X Syndrome. Update yourself on the latest about this often missed but important prototype of developmental delay. Speakers are recognised experts in their field:

Medical
Dr Jonathan Cohen

Occupational Therapy
Cathy Love

Optometry
Rashelle Cohen

Speech Pathology
Felicia Schmaman,
Beverley Sher

Psychology
Astra King

**Genetic Counselling &
Parent Support**
Samantha Wake ,
Mary Lloyd

- Date Friday 5th November
- Time 8.30 am 'til 4:30 pm (Registration 8:15)
- Venue Ella Latham Lecture Theatre
Royal Children's Hospital
- Registration Fee (includes a light lunch and published
Course proceedings)
\$145.00 per person (if booked before 30/9/99)
\$180.00 per person (if booked after 30/9/99)

Spaces are limited so early booking is advised. For further details, please contact 9528 191

Registration Form:

Please complete and post (together with cheque) to :

Fragile X Alliance inc.
263 Glen Eira Rd, North Caulfield 3161
NB All cheques to be made out to "Fragile X Alliance
Inc."

First Name _____ Last Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

Profession _____ Email _____

THE IRLLEN DYSLEXIA CENTRE - COLOURED LENSES

(reprinted from Autism News Victoria June '99)

In response to a number of queries, we (Autism News Victoria) contacted this centre and have obtained a number of informational articles. This system of coloured lenses is based on the work of Helen Irlen. She described a condition of perceptual deficits exhibited by people with literacy problems. She named the condition Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome, more recently Irlen Syndrome. Some of the symptoms of Irlen Syndrome are light sensitivity, problems with contrast and print, restricted reading span, poor depth perception and attentional deficits. After an intensive diagnostic assessment, the treatment is the use of precision tinted filters worn as glasses or lens overlays designed to reduce or eliminate perception difficulties and light sensitivity.

Donna Williams and Wendy Lawson have written about the benefits of the Irlen lenses. Some families may wish to pursue this treatment option for their child or adult with and autistic disorder. The only place that we know of in Victoria for the assessment and supply of these lenses is the Irlen Dyslexia Centre run by Gloria Thomas. It is at 74 Shady Grove, Forest Hill, phone (03) 9807 7822. The cost is approximately \$350.00 for a consultation and supply of lenses - you have to provide your own spectacle frames. We have placed the information supplied to us by the Irlen Centre into a resource folder, which can be borrowed from the Autism Victoria library.

This information is now available in the Autism Tasmania library.
Editor

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people from all over Australia and overseas who all shared their area of speciality. Socially, it was lovely to catch up with old acquaintances and make new friends and share information and personal experiences of how ASD has in some way touched our lives in so many different ways. Autism Tasmania and the Conference Committee did such a wonderful job of making the conference a success even down to putting in an order for warm, sunny weather over the 3 days!!

I left Hobart feeling both sad that the conference was over, but also somewhat refreshed and feeling very motivated about raising a wider awareness of Autism in our community. Providing information regarding early intervention and educational programs for children with an ASD empowers parents and professionals. Knowledge, resources and support will enable those with an ASD to reach their full potential in every aspect of life.

Corry Vakintis

Northern Integration Support Team (NIST) & Young Autism Support Tasmania (YAST)

will be presenting a workshop on Behavioural Educational Programs and Intervention Strategies for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Date Sunday 26th Sept

Venue Adult Education Recreation Room

51 York St Launceston 7250

Time 10 am – 4:30 pm

Admission

FREE parents/carers

\$5.00 Professionals

Coffee/tea and light snacks provided. Please bring your own lunch or bring a plate to share.

Speakers

- Directors of ABA Kids P/L Tas
- Coordinators of ABA programs
- Therapists (home/school) based
- Parents and children currently involved in home and school based ABA programs
- Members of YAST and NIST

Enquiries: Georgina at NIST 63341622 North
 Corry Vakantis 63434942 North
 Angela Enright 6362 3633 NW

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a life-long disability due to a brain disorder, the cause of which is unknown. One in a thousand people are affected. Autism Spectrum Disorder prevents people from properly understanding the world around them in the otherwise sense: as well as affecting their ability to communicate, learn, interact with others and play.

These useful cards are available from Autism Tas. for \$1.00 for 20. Keep a few in your wallet to hand out at those times you need to explain your child's behaviour.

AUTISM TASMANIA Inc.
 Autism Tasmania's phone number is in your white pages

NEWS AND VIEWS

YOUNG AUTISM SUPPORT TASMANIA

YAST has just come to the end of a very busy year with our second Annual General Meeting and election of office bearers being held on Wednesday September 15 1999. Also at this meeting, ABAKidz Director, Nicole Kingston, who has recently returned from 3 months in Norway where the state funds intensive early intervention in the form of ABA as well as providing extensive ABA support to children included in regular schools, will speak about the latest developments in this field. In the past few months we have held a social sharing day for YAST members in late June at Munford Street Early Special Education Centre in Launceston, as well as co-hosting an information sharing day with Giant Steps at the Kings Meadows Community Centre on July 11. We were very grateful to Autism Tasmania for making it possible for families to access Commonwealth Respite for Carers funds, which enabled a larger number of people to attend. A genuine spirit of co-operation and shared purpose emerged on this day with Giant Steps and a follow-up day was planned at which both groups could: 1. share practical strategies as well as 2. pool ideas in order to come up with some "big picture" suggestions about statewide service provision.

Since the sharing day with Giant Steps, Autism Tasmania has facilitated a forum of stakeholders in the Tasmanian Autism community by setting up an initial meeting, admirably facilitated by former Education Department State Autism Consultant Mrs Jenny Vince, at the National Conference held in Hobart in August and also Education Minister, Paula Wriedt has since then announced a forum into Autism service provision and so we are awaiting further details about these ventures before deciding how best to proceed. At last, things seem to be moving for the Tasmanian Autism Community! Many YAST members attended the National Conference and enjoyed hearing a number of presenters speaking about ABA therapies in both special school and inclusive settings. Our YAST secretary, Rosemary Rush, was part of a team presentation on collaborative planning in inclusion and ABAKidz directors, Nicole Kingston and Cassie LeFevre also spoke about teaching the structured development of play skills in both home-based ABA and school settings. Therapist, Amelia Bishop displayed a poster about a

case study of a Tasmanian child who has made outstanding developmental gains and no longer meets the criteria for Autism after 2 years of intensive behavioural intervention as well as providing a summary of a recent study into the common features of 12 best-outcome children who have received intensive ABA through the services of ISADD. One comment from our members about the conference was that not one of the keynote speakers mentioned ABA and that it appears that there is still a long way to go in enlisting mainstream support for our therapy of choice.

Lisa Minchin

APPLIED BEHAVIOUR ANALYSIS (ABA)

For the many parents involved in Applied Behaviour Analysis and those who want to find out a little more, we would like to remind you of some items that are in the Autism Tasmania library

Worthwhile reading are:

"Let me hear your voice – a Family's triumph over Autism" by Catherine Maurice

"Teaching Developmentally Disabled Children" by O Ivar Lovaas (Also known as The Me Book)

"Behavioural Intervention for Young Children with Autism" edited by Catherine Maurice

New to the library is a video:

Lovaas (1987) Behavioural Treatment of Autistic Children
40 mins (This video is not A1 quality but very watchable)

On order is a video entitled:

"Autism :Early Intervention and Behavioural Modification Workshop– Lovaas method.

Presented by Jennifer Perlis

Also available is a large number of articles which are available in a folder or can be copied and sent to you for a nominal fee.

Rose Clark

GIANT STEPS

Most readers will be aware of the recent publicity surrounding the funding difficulties at Giant Steps. Government members visiting the centre are loud in their praises of the program and have voiced their opinions that the Centre must remain open. Despite this; despite meetings and discussions with members of both State and Federal Governments; despite discussions and admissions to the Education Department, appropriate funding is not forthcoming and our financial problems are far from being resolved. We had applied for Short term Emergency Assistance (again!) as it seems to be the only avenue available to us at the moment.

The situation at the Centre is not ideal. This has been a difficult and stressful time for staff, parents and board.

In order to reduce costs we have been forced to cut staff numbers by the equivalent of 6 full-time positions. This has been achieved by reducing the number of hours worked by all staff, including management and office staff.

Staff members and parents are to be congratulated on the way they have pulled together to avoid the closure of the Centre. Staff have modified the program to best suit the needs of the children, given the financial restraints. Parents are manning the office, coordinating volunteers and assisting in so many other ways despite the pressures involved in caring for their autistic children. Thank you.

Two staff members opted for redundancies and we are sorry to lose these qualified and dedicated people who have given so much to the children in their care over the years.

The board, although extremely frustrated at meeting brick walls head on, will continue to vigorously pursue funding avenues. Many thanks to those members of the public who have indicated their support by making a donation to the Centre. A very big thank you to the members of the Van Diemens Street Rod club for their continuing support and very generous donation of \$10,165 following their recent Car Show at the Silverdome.

Giant Steps looks forward to participating in the proposed Autism Forum recently announced by Paula Wriedt. Society has an obligation to all its members and for too long its autistic members have been sidelined. Parents need effective services for their autistic children.

They also need options as to which type of service best suits the needs of their children. Funding bodies need to recognise that autism is a very difficult condition to treat, that appropriate early intervention is crucial, that giant Steps is one options and that no option is cheap

Tricia Bourke

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therapists, and also how their partners feel about them. Secondly, three mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, presented a quilt they had made in an effort to express their feelings and to provide support to each other. They read out poems and told stories about their experience with their children. One mother had a child with high functioning Autism, another had a child with moderate Autism, and the third had one with a severe intellectual disability, and another with severe epilepsy, severe Autism, and severe intellectual disability. As these women were telling their stories, I started to weep, and noticed that almost everyone else in the room had tears running down their faces. Their presentation was the most fulfilling, inspirational, and motivating of the conference, and I take my hat off to them for having the courage to share it with us.

Louise Vernieux
Clinical Neuropsychologist

Reprinted with the author's permission from "Keeping in Touch" Spring Edition 1999 of St John's Children's Services Newsletter.

LIBRARY - NEW BOOKS

- **Set for Gold - "Strategies for life"** by Josie Santomauro
- **Conference Proceedings from the 1999 National Autism Conference** (contains 90% of papers presented in Hobart)
- **Descriptions of PMS Symptoms in women with Disability** by Margaret Kyrkan (completed in November '98) as requirement for Master of Disability Studies -Flinders University
- **My Brother is Different** - an excellent picture story book written for younger siblings aged 3-7.

BOOK REVIEWS

Title/s: *Visual Stress, Oxford Psychology Series No. 24 OUP, Oxford, 1995*
Author: Arnold J Wilkins

Reviewer: John Wigg

This monograph is a digest of years of research by Wilkins of the MRC Applied Psychology unit in Cambridge, UK, and fellow researchers into things that cause visual stress for photosensitive epileptics and migraine sufferers. To one unfamiliar with the technical terminology of optics, the research details presented are at times heavy going. However, Wilkins' model of visual stress factors as having impact on sites in the visual cortex of the brain goes a long way towards an understanding of the neurological basis for photophobia, mosaic vision and visual sensory overloads experienced by many autistic people.

Visual Stress is important to those working with autistic people. A significant number of autistic people also suffer from epilepsy. Moreover, many autistic people suffer from visual stress problems associated with fluorescent lighting, bright light and reading pages of black-on-white text.

Wilkins' work provides independent confirmation that precision-tinted glasses and overlay transparencies like those advocated by Helen Irlen do provide relief for visual dyslexia and related visual stress problems. It is not surprising that autistic people such as Wendy Lawson and Donna Williams have been greatly helped by Irlen tinted lenses.

The appendix at the end of Wilkins' book offers techniques for treatment of visual stress in the following areas:

- Prevention of photosensitive epileptic seizures
- Headaches and eyestrain from lighting
- Headaches, eyestrain and seizures from reading

- Using colour as therapy for visual stress from the pulsation of fluorescent lights and for pattern glare stress factors simultaneously.

Title/s: *When Autism Strikes: Families Cope with Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Plenum Press, New York, 1998*
 Editor: Robert A. Catalano

Reviewer: John Wigg

It is rare that two Giant Steps children are found in the pages of the one book. They are in this one!

When Autism Strikes is about children with Childhood Disintegrative Disorder [CDD a.k.a. Heller's Syndrome]. CDD is an Autism Spectrum Disorder [ASD] with later than usual onset, marked developmental regression and a poor prognosis. CDD can be confused with Acquired Epileptic Aphasia [AEA a.k.a. Landau-Kleffner Syndrome], another late-onset ASD.

The book is a valuable source of case history data for CDD. The parents have in each case told their child's story with considerable attention to detail and the methodical approach of a chronicler.

The reader is left with the indelible impression of parents who rightly have taken drastic measures to find answers to a baffling and drastic ASD. The true value of a human life, no matter how young or impaired, is infinitely more than cold, hard cash can buy.

The eight children whose stories appear in *When Autism Strikes* each have the same CDD diagnosis. Yet each child is not a carbon copy of the other in history and intensity of disorder. This fact is a salutary reminder. Even within a subset of the autism spectrum, every individual presents as a unique person with his or her own unique set of problems. Clearly, the "individual" part of the IEP concept must never be lost sight of if autism is to be confronted adequately.