

# *Spectrum News*

*The Magazine of Autism Tasmania Inc.*

ISSUE: September 2012



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**Soulmates at the Playhouse Theatre**

**Book Review: The Boy who Fell to Earth**

**Brixhibition at Moonah Arts Centre**

**A Mother's Journey by Alison Trimble**

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Have you looked at our Website lately? We will be adding useful information and links regularly.  
Check it out!

[www.autismtas.org.au](http://www.autismtas.org.au)



Find us on  
**Facebook**



## Imperfection

I recently attended the 2012 Better Board Conference in Melbourne. This conference is specifically geared to Not-For-Profit CEOs and Board members. It covered a vast array of topics including, just to name a few; legal liability, governance, compliance, women on boards and the imperfect CEO.



Whilst at the conference I was particularly inspired by Kevin Larkin and his presentation titled the Imperfect CEO. I was immediately drawn to this workshop recognising myself as a learner and acknowledging the fact, I am an imperfect CEO. Actually I was quite relieved by the title and felt aligned to it straight away!

So much of what is written about leadership and the CEO implies the development of perfection. In fact, CEOs benefit if they see themselves as less than perfect, incomplete and fill the gaps by relying on the skills and experience of others from within the organisation and the committee.

Organisations benefit from this "incomplete" approach as a renewed energy comes from continual input of staff and committee members who fill the gaps the CEO can't. I have witnessed the impetus and renewed excitement staff gain from the expertise and skills shared by colleagues and members of the committee.

The CEO in a small organisation can be burdened by striving to be all things. This too, is something I have experienced in my role. An alternative approach is to accept the truth that perfection is not possible and to focus not only on what is possible but on the aspects of leadership as a CEO that will most benefit the organisation.

I see myself as a lifelong learner. And lifelong learners are the sort of people I want on my team. Learners bring with them, imperfections people align themselves to.

Kevin Larkin tells us the role of the CEO is to establish trust, provide positive energy, upgrade the team, make unpopular decisions, be curious, inspire risk taking and of course celebrate success! I strive to bring these qualities to Autism Tasmania.

Andrea Brumby, CEO



promoting development of  
young children on the autism spectrum

Early Days provides workshops for mothers, fathers and other family carers of children who have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or who are going through the assessment and diagnosis process.

Early Days is a national program funded by the Federal Government under the Helping Children with Autism Strategy and is run by local facilitators.

### The next workshops are:

#### Introduction to ASD

**Hobart**—November 3rd

**Burnie**— November 9th

**Launceston** - November 29th

#### Understanding Behaviour

**Burnie**— November 23rd

**Hobart**—November 24th

**Launceston**—December 6th

## Register today!

Email:

[earlydays@autismtas.org.au](mailto:earlydays@autismtas.org.au)

Call:

1300 288 476



**Autism**  
**TASMANIA INC.**

This workshop is for parents and other family carers only. For professional development opportunities, please contact your state/ territory Autism Association.

## From the Director of *Soul Mates*, Meredith McQueen:

My son Alec is 19 years old and has autism. He is probably smack bang in the middle of the autism spectrum. He has good speech but cannot hold or follow a conversation. He reads very well but confines himself totally to picture books. He has taught himself the name of every street in Hobart and can navigate himself easily across town yet he cannot orient his clothes correctly to dress himself. He has lots of sensory problems too - his idea of hell would be a place with supermarket scanners going constantly where you are forced to eat wet, mushy food!

As my journey with autism has progressed over the last 15 years, I have come to the conclusion that the autism spectrum is very broad indeed. I think at its highest functioning end it just tapers off into the general population!

Not long after Alec's diagnosis, I attended a presentation by Aspergers guru Tony Attwood. I well remember Tony telling us that you will find people with Aspergers syndrome in many walks of life. "Consider academics", he said, "I like to wander around university campuses and play 'Who has Aspergers'. And then I like to go down to the engineering faculty and play 'Who **hasn't** got Aspergers!'" There was of course great laughter at this but I shifted uncomfortably in my seat because I am in fact a civil engineer. Tony went on to explain that girls with Aspergers often evade diagnosis at school because they discover Speech and Drama. "Suddenly they find a subject that teaches them the rules of social interaction. They have a script so they know exactly what to say and how they should be reacting. Moreover they have a reason to go out and interact with other young people by putting on plays!"

By now I was feeling rather sick because it seemed that Tony was describing my life! I had always been a nerdy, 'mathematics' type of person who was good at visual things like drawing. I had always been a bit of a loner with just a handful of friends and I did discover drama at school and it has remained a life long hobby.

And yet I doubt that I would ever have satisfied the diagnostic criteria for Aspergers syndrome. Rather I see in myself character traits that I also see in many of my work colleagues and friends. We tend to be quiet, reserved people with specific interests, who avoid social situations. I will procrastinate for days about making a phone call. I've stopped being surprised by the number of engineers and surveyors I have met who have family members on the autism spectrum. I am seriously thinking of suggesting that child health nurses place a red 'flag' on the files of infants with an engineer parent!

At the first autism support meeting I ever attended, I recognized another mum across the room - we had both been in the same mathematics tutorial group at university! I have two close female friends that I met doing theatre activities. One, who trained as a scientist, has a father with Aspergers. The other is a maths teacher with an Aspergers sister.

All of which brings me back to the theatre. This has been a great hobby for me - and my husband! It forces us out of the house to interact with other people. Furthermore nerds like us are often good at memorizing lines and reproducing accents!

David Williamson's *Soulmates* marks my first attempt at directing a full length play. It is not accidental that Williamson also trained as an engineer - I identify with this guy! So far, my project management training has kept things rolling along. We have the set model built, the poster designed, the music tracks selected and the auditions completed. I'm sure I will have some bumpy times ahead as the rehearsals progress but I am learning heaps about tact and people handling!

I hope that you can come along to the charity preview night on 24<sup>th</sup> October. I might see you on the night (or I might be hiding backstage).

**Soul Mates is a comedy no book lover should miss!**

HOBART REPERTORY THEATRE SOCIETY  
presents

David Williamson's  
**Soul  
Mates**

Directed by  
**Meredith McQueen**

What sort of  
writing is great  
literature?

**Autism Tasmania Fundraiser**

**24 OCT- 2012**

**7:30 for 8 pm start**

The Playhouse Theatre

26th Oct—10th Nov 2012

Wed to Sat 8pm

Matinee Sat 3rd Nov 2pm

To purchase tickets call  
Autism Tasmania 1300 288 476



NEW  
SYDNEY  
HOTEL



Autism Tasmania have a limited number of tickets available at the concession rate of \$20 per ticket for the night of the 24th of October. Please support this Autism Tasmania fundraiser and our local theatre company.

**Call 1300 288 476 or ph 6278 9985 to book now!**



# Support Groups



## Autism Support South

Hi my name is Robyn Davis, many of you would already know me through connections with Autism Tasmania. I have an 8 year old son with autism and have plenty of personal experience living and caring for a person with autism.

For the past twelve months I've been voluntarily coordinating autism information sessions in the south for families and carers of people with an ASD. These groups have been a wonderful opportunity for me to meet other people in the autism community. Many friendships have formed and we've had a lot of tears and laughs along the way.

Supporting people living with autism is a passion of mine and I am really pleased to be working at Autism Tasmania as the southern support person. In my role I will be continuing to support existing groups and establish and coordinate new support groups around southern Tasmania.

In recent weeks I've been going through our family register and identifying areas of need in our local community, so watch this space! A support group could be starting in your area in the near future. In the meantime, if you are keen to start a group, I can help coordinate and provide resources as required.

An important part of my role is providing individual support for families and people with

autism. I am available to chat with you over the phone or you can make a time to come in for a consultation. I generally work Wednesdays and Fridays, however I am flexible and I'll do my best to meet your needs. Through consultations I can provide information about; local services, funding options for people with an ASD, social groups, support groups and referral advice.

My Autism Tasmania mobile is 0408 376 838 or you can email me at [robyn@autismtas.org.au](mailto:robyn@autismtas.org.au). I would love to hear from you and I look forward to working with you.

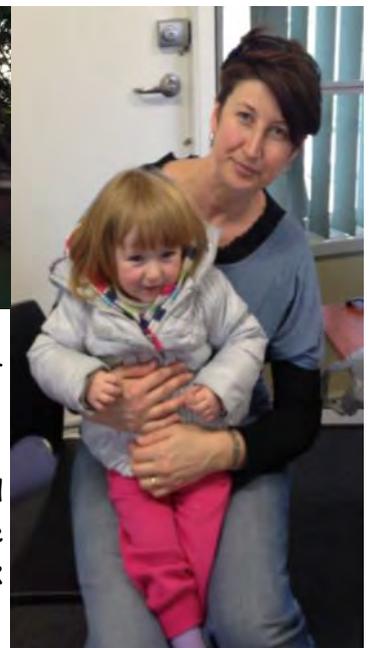
Robyn Davis



Happy Birthday to the Wednesday Parent Support Group!



**Above:** Dunalley Support Group venue



**Right:** Melissa Felusch and her daughter attending the Bridgewater/New Norfolk Support Group

# Support Groups



## Southern Adult Asperger group

Seven years have passed since the first get together of what is now the southern adult Asperger group. Our first meeting was at Tascare in Moonah where we met for a number of years until Autism Tasmania established its own premises. Since then there have been a couple of moves as the organisation moved to bigger offices.

At the most recent get together we had many of the 'original' attendees as well as new members who have joined over the past 6 or so years - there were 14 in all to hear our guest speaker, a wonderful Occupational Therapist talking about sensory issues, why they occur and some useful strategies. There was a lot of input from many of those listening who have a wealth of personal experience and many useful and ingenious ways to manage the sensory challenges they face on a daily basis.

Each time the group meets there is usually a topic of interest to focus on - that topic is chosen by the group themselves for discussion or to find out more about. There is always time for afternoon tea as well during the afternoon.

The group usually meet on the last Sunday in the month at the Autism Tasmania offices. The only reason the day is changed is if it falls on a public holiday or in a recognised holiday period such as Easter or Christmas. New people are very welcome to attend along with a friend, a family member or support person.

## Northern Adult Asperger group

The northern group was established in September in 2008 and like the southern group meet monthly. This group has also had a number of venues during the past (nearly) 4 years and now meet in a lovely building on the corner of Charles and Frederick Street that was kindly offered to us by Aspire.

At the last get together we had 11 people join the group for the afternoon where we played board games after a session of 'show and tell'. Each person brought along something of interest to them - we even had a real live Ducati to look at and envy.

Each time the group meets there is a focus for that particular session as well as time to have afternoon tea. For enquiries about both groups phone: Rose on 0407 320 048. People attending the groups do not need a diagnosis to attend.

Rose Clark

## Northern Support

It has been exciting to see our George Town group developing in the last few months. We have had an information session on Strategies for Success with regards to challenging public outings, and most recently we watched the movie Magnificent 7 which promoted some very valuable discussion and reflection.

The Launceston Coffee Morning is evolving too. Our move to the Northern Children's Network has enabled us to welcome families with young children, which has made the group much more accessible for many families. Conversations continue to be lively, heartfelt and informative, with the support shared between families invaluable. These sessions are also an effective means of sharing current relevant information with families with regards to services and resources available to them.

Our Launceston Evening Information Group has met several times since the last Spectrum News was published. In July we shared tips and recipes that are successful with fussy eaters, and we are in the process of forming a collection of recipes to compile into a book - so if you have something you would like to contribute I would love to receive it! Jodi Hill, an Occupational Therapist from St Giles spoke with us at our August meeting - she shared with us the many and varied ways in which OT can be of assistance when raising a child with ASD. The discussion her presentation sparked was dynamic and full of "ah-ha" moments!

During the last few months it is exciting for me to report that Deborah Smith and I have made several trips to more remote parts of the northern region. We have established a support group in Dorset; meeting at the Dorset Community House in Scottsdale. We have also used our time in Dorset to conduct some individual consultations with clients living in this area. Whilst I will not be able to personally attend the group every month, Dorset Community House and the parents who have attended the group in these early stages are energized and enthusiastic for it to continue.

Deborah and I, in conjunction with staff from the Early Childhood Intervention Service and the East Coast's very own Karen Rawnsley held an Autism Information Day in St Helen's. This provided several families with a valuable opportunity to discuss the needs of their family with us. It was also a wonderful opportunity for us to learn more about the services currently on offer in this region, and to meet the wonderful people that drive them. I am looking forward to future visits to the sunny east coast!

Robyn Thomas

The Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) package is an Australian Government initiative which provides additional support and services for children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, their families and carers. The Autism Advisor Service is one component of this package and is being delivered in Tasmania by the Autism Tasmania.

There has been significant changes to our Autism Advisory Service team during the first half of 2012. Robyn Thomas and Maree Morgan maintained operations in the North and North West of the State whilst the process of recruiting a new Autism Advisor (North) was conducted. Deborah Smith commenced as Advisor (North) in late March and has been a real asset to our State-wide team. Nella Keane and Jodie Denman continue to facilitate our services in the South and we now have a consolidated regional and dynamic team.

Our Autism Advisory team primarily supports families to access the Helping Children with Autism funding on behalf of their child/ren who have been formally diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum condition before their 6th birthday. The programme objective of the Autism Advisor Service is to provide 'impartial and evidence based information' to families about the range of intervention options and services available under the HCWA package.

We have seen a significant increase in the number of families/carers who are registering to access the HCWA initiative and we are continuing to actively network and partner with diagnostic services, medical professionals and other service provider organisations to ensure that we are providing timely processing of claims for funding as well as providing accurate, consistent and relevant information to our clients. We have also been very proactive as a team in the ongoing evaluation of our current procedures in order that we offer the best service to suit our families. By way of example, we have undertaken a very flexible approach to the delivery of our face to face consultations by diversifying into such formats as regional group consultations, consultations held at other service provider locations, home, school based etc. We are very much focussed on and conscious of customising our services to accommodate the identified needs of our clients.

Autism Tasmania has also been successful in securing a one-off additional funding package from FaHCSIA and we are utilising these funds for a variety of identified purposes within the Autism Advisor Service, one of which is the provision of additional regional and remote consultations. We believe that regional access to our Autism Advisor Service is an integral component of our service provision, as we aim to offer and deliver a truly state-wide service. The funding will also be used to assist in the review of our procedures for follow-up with families after they have had an initial face to face consultation, together with the development of a defined and appropriate exit strategy from our Autism Advisor Service and transition into our Family Support area once a child has turned 7 years old.

Ultimately as an Advisory Team we are invested in and committed to the process of continuous improvement and aspire to provide the best possible service provision, care, support and education to our families and value the vital and unique role that we play within the autism community in Tasmania.





Thankyou Sorell Lions Club for presenting a cheque following the previous successful Brixhibition Fundraiser!

## BRIXHIBITION A 3 day TAZ-Br ICK event!!!!

Thursday the 13<sup>th</sup> of September

An opportunity exists for those who can to set their displays in the late afternoon.

Friday the 14<sup>th</sup> of September

1<sup>st</sup> Day – It is a 9.30am start with the focus of the morning having Cassy O'Connor officially open the event before 10.30am.

At 10.30am the focus will shift to promote the younger generation in building and creating items to display throughout the day and it is hoped that many autistic children and their parents will come along to participate.

I will personally will be displaying for the whole three days with the intention of building a large scale City Layout which will include as many Modular Buildings and features as possible.

Closing time for the patrons will be at 5.00pm whereby those who wish to set up for the weekend only can do so however the cut off period will be 9.00pm unless otherwise arranged.

Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup> of September

2<sup>nd</sup> Day – Doors will open at 9.30am and it is advisable that you are completely set up and ready to go on time as keen enthusiasts will be entering the building throughout the whole day.

Closing time for the patrons will be at 5.00pm whereby those who wish to tidy up for the Sunday can do so however the cut off period will be 6.00pm unless otherwise arranged.

Sunday the 16<sup>th</sup> of September

3<sup>rd</sup> Day – Doors will open at 9.30am and it is advisable that you are completely set up and ready to go on time as keen enthusiasts will be entering the building throughout the whole day.

Closing time for the patrons will be at 4.00pm whereby it is time to pack everything up and return home safely after an enjoyable event !!!

Come along to the Moonah Arts Centre On the 14th, 15th & 16th of September to support an exhibition no Lego-lover could resist!

# Autism Tasmania Raises Awareness of Autism.

It is estimated that approximately 1 in 110 people in Australia have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Autism is a lifelong developmental disorder that affects communication, social interaction and behaviour. Every person with autism presents differently and the symptoms vary and present in varying degrees. Autism can create confusion, frustration and anxiety with everyday activities.

Autism Tasmania is able to provide tailored professional development and training for staff working in schools, disability services and other similar organisations. We can provide training around a range of autism specific topics including; Understanding ASD, Visual Strategies and Supports, Transitions and Routines, Sensory Sensitivities, Understanding Anxiety, Social skills, Positive Behaviour Support and more.

Autism Tasmania currently has three regionally based teams of consultants who have several years of personal and professional experience with autism. Our consultants are able to tailor their presentations and training to meet a variety of specific requirements.

This year we have 14 workshops in Tasmania providing professional development for teachers and teacher assistants. The response and attendance has been overwhelming and the feedback is fantastic. It is envisaged that these workshops will extend to the North-West Coast and parent/carers in 2013.

We hope that through raising awareness and providing training we generate greater understanding of autism and an increased capacity for people with autism to become positively engaged in their school, workplace, home and the local community.

If you would like to register for workshops or receive more information about our fee-for-service training and the costs involved, please contact us for further details.

Andrea Brumby  
CEO



## Two Day Workshop and Information Sessions for PARENTS/CARERS of School Aged Students on the Autism Spectrum

Workshop: 2012TASPC1

Location: Huon/Channel

A Positive Partnerships workshop is coming to your community.

The Positive Partnerships initiatives have been developed and delivered by Partnerships between Education and the Autism Community (PEAC) and funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations through the Helping Children with Autism package.

### What will you learn?

As a result of participating in the workshops and information sessions as parents/carers you will gain:

- a greater understanding of the impact of autism on your child, both at school and at home
- knowledge about how to develop effective parent, school and teacher partnerships
- specific strategies on how to:
  - advocate for your child
  - support your child's participation at school
  - develop an awareness of ongoing learning needs
  - information about your local school system's processes
- opportunities to network and share strategies with other parents/carers and key community members
- opportunities for discussion around a range of topics relevant to students with an ASD and their families

Some key community representatives that support families living with autism will be identified and invited to participate in the workshop with a view to supporting a community focus beyond the workshop.

### Workshop details

Venue: Brookfield Margate Function Centre  
1640 Channel Highway, Margate, Tasmania

When: Two-Day Workshop  
2 & 3 October 2012  
Day 1: 9.00 a.m - 4.30 p.m  
Day 2: 9 a.m - 4.00 p.m

When: Two-Day Workshop – 2 & 3 October 2012  
(Registration from 8.15am)

Registration for this workshop will open Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2012

Please visit the website to register [www.positivepartnerships.com.au](http://www.positivepartnerships.com.au).

For more information please contact the Positive Partnerships workshop Info Line number: 1300 881 971



## Subjects, Stress and IEPs

### How the standard timetable didn't work

I used to think that if a child was having difficulty at school, a caring parent would know, pretty well straight away, what the problem was, and have a good idea about how to fix it. I could not have been more wrong. I believe that I was a caring Mum all through my son's High School years, but I honestly didn't have a clue about the problems he was experiencing, or how to make things better for him. My expectations that my son would follow the same educational path as any neurotypical student simply didn't fit with what he could and couldn't, and wouldn't, do. And if he had continued to bear the burden of the mainstream timetable, I think he might have disengaged from school completely – and not gone back.

My son Matt was diagnosed as being significantly more affected by his Asperger's Syndrome than 70% of the population with Asperger's. He has low muscle tone, which makes handwriting difficult, and this is added to the considerable difficulty he has in processing written information from the board to reproduce it onto the paper in front of him. On the positive side however, he has a wide vocabulary, reads at adult levels, and is very strong in mathematics. But he just couldn't manage the whole package of school.

On top of that, his recreational topics of interest were probably a year or two behind those of his fellow students – although his knowledge about all things technological and his digital experience continues to astound me – and he is socially awkward with his peers. Matt did not make a single friend in High School, and so had no social support when he found the going difficult. Breaktimes and lunchtimes were excruciating for him.

Once we had obtained the diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome, and Matt was slowly re-introduced to full-time schooling at the local High School, he still had problems. I know that he tried his heart out, but he just couldn't do what the Humanities subjects required of him: asking Matt to "imagine" life as a Bronze Age tribesman was like asking him to jump over the moon – it was simply beyond him. I don't think he ever wrote an entire essay in all the time he was at High School, and creating fiction was as alien to him as computer programming is to me. He even found Science really difficult, because experiments were always done with a buddy (and he didn't have one), organisation in the lab was important (and his personal organisation is non-existent, except in his area of interest), and notes were always put up on the board (where he let them stay). So Matt could memorize the Periodic Table with little effort, but he couldn't pull together a lab report.

However, he did enjoy and was good at Mathematics, was pretty much at home with computing, and he liked Cooking. And the basis of those subjects is probably not as dissimilar as they might first seem; they use a given formula, which you apply to produce a pre-determined output. They were the only subjects in the whole timetable that Matt enjoyed, and did not object to attending.

But when senior teachers saw that he had excellent numeracy, and that he could read and speak like a grown-up, they considered that he should also be achieving similar standards throughout the rest of the Curriculum. They concluded that the reason he wasn't, was that Matt was just not trying. In fairness though, this High School had little previous experience of students with Asperger's Syndrome, although they had previous students on the Spectrum who were not as high-functioning as Matt, and they really didn't understand much about Aspie students.

Nonetheless, for a while I was influenced by their views and I gave Matt a terrible time when he didn't want to go to school. And the harder I pushed him to attend, the more resistant he became. I can remember so vividly, one morning, sitting with Matt in the car outside the school gates, and the poor kid was literally shaking, in tears, begging me not to make him go into school. It was at that stage that I started to think that perhaps the 'Just do it' mainstream answer wasn't the right one for us, because forcing Matt to attend was causing more problems than it was solving.

It was at that stage that I was given the phone number of an autism consultant employed by the Education Department to advise schools about students on the Spectrum. I rang, and she was happy for me to pour out all my concerns about Matt and his school attendance, and she listened through my tears and sobs, and she became one of my angels in civilian clothes, who really helped us get through High School.

And she explained to me about the extraordinary stress which is experienced by children on the Spectrum, as a direct consequence of how High School is, and how, for some students with autism, the whole of High School is too much to cope with. And we met, and talked more about Matt's strengths and weaknesses and how we could build on the good bits and minimise the impact of the not-so-good bits. And she offered to arrange a meeting with the High School, which she would attend with me as Matt's advocate (despite her job being to advise school authorities). And she persuaded me that the standard timetable really might not be in Matt's best interests.

### **Matt's non-standard timetable**

Surprisingly, there was very little resistance from Matt's school to the idea of a restricted, or non-standard, timetable – basically because I think they had reached the same conclusion as me: that the standard approach was not working, and was not going to work. And it would be better for Matt to be engaged with some subjects, and hence still coming to school, than be disengaged from education completely. I don't know what sort of paperwork was required to make our

situation formal (or even whether any approval or authorisation was obtained), but in any event, Matt attended some of Grade 9, and then Grade 10, on a restricted timetable, which meant that he did between 50-75% on the usual subject load.

This absolutely would not be the answer for everyone; there are other options which would be appropriate for other students. But it saved Matt from becoming wholly disengaged from education, and supported him to do some learning in the areas he was most interested in. I was disappointed that Matt missed out on essay-writing skills and learning how to research a topic thoroughly, but I had to finally admit to myself that it wasn't about what me – the important thing was to keep Matt in some form of education. And if the time comes when he requires those skills, there will be supports available to him to help him gain what he needs.

Matt's timetable ended up with a late start/or early finish on 3 days, with one completely full day, followed by a free day in the middle of the week. He attended classes in cookery, computing and maths, and that level of attendance seemed to be about right for him. He was completely wiped out by the full day and slept most of the free day, but he managed to go to school most of the time. He still tried it on to pull a 'sickie' now and again, but it became a lot easier for me to work out if he was actually really tired, if he was playing possum because of a test or maybe some bullying, or if he was just pushing the envelope.

One advantage of Matt's restricted timetable was that, in Grades 9 and 10, the High School offered a lot of different learning options to the students – they could do some study at other schools, go out into the workplace for experience, start vocational courses. So students were coming and going all over the place – Matt wasn't the only one who was only at school for part of the time, so his restricted attendance didn't stand out as much as it might otherwise have done.

### **Distance education**

At the time when Matt was just refusing to attend High School, because everything about it was too difficult for him (the learning, the social demands, the bullying), the principal of another school suggested to me that perhaps Matt should be enrolled in distance learning. I have also spoken to some other parents of students on the Spectrum, who have found that distance education provides a worthwhile alternative to mainstream schooling for their children.

I gave serious thought to enrolling Matt in e-school, but in the end, decided to persevere with the face-to-face High School system, for the following reasons:

- Matt's passionate area of interest is video-gaming, some of which is done on a PC. I didn't think that Matt had the maturity, or willpower to separate his PC gaming use from PC school use. I could see that every time he lost interest in schoolwork, he would be gaming.

- I am Matt's only caregiver, and as such we have a fairly close, sometimes intense, relationship. I felt that Matt would require very close supervision if he was to get any benefit from e-school, and my taking on the additional roles of schoolteacher and disciplinarian was likely to have a negative result on our homelife.
- Matt is an only child, who resides with a sole parent, and lives with a condition which is socially isolating. I considered that he needed to be around other students so that he could observe social interactions. Matt does not have an inherent understanding of social skills, but has developed certain coping strategies by copying the behaviours of people around him. Mainstream High School presented him (and me) with a lot of grief, but it also gave him great opportunities to learn a lot about how neurotypicals behave.

So, we didn't do distance education – and I still don't know whether that decision was right, wrong or somewhere in between. But I remember, when we were looking for a primary school for Matt, and discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the public and private systems, I decided that whatever decision we came to, it was likely to be wrong, at least some of the time. And it's probably the same with the e-school thing. You just have to make a decision and give it your best shot.

## IEPs

I am ashamed to say, this is an area where I think I let Matt down.

As many people are aware, special needs students are often provided with an IEP (Individual Education Plan), sometimes called an Individual Learning Plan. This document is supposed to be prepared by the school (with input from the student's teachers, aides and the special needs advisor) and negotiated with the student's parents or carers. It sets out, in detail, the ways in which the student's learning is to be supported. An IEP could deal with anything relevant to the student's learning, including such issues as physical arrangements (for example, if the student had a physical disability and had to be assigned to a wheelchair accessible classroom), organisational arrangements (for example, placement in a smaller class with a more experienced teacher, if challenging behaviour is an issue), or curriculum matters (for a student with Asperger's Syndrome this might address the type of assessment work expected of the student). An IEP is supposed to be created to fit the individual student and his or her learning needs; it should be continually updated and revised. All in all, IEPs take a great deal of work.

When Matt started at the public High School at the start of Grade 9 I had several meetings with senior teachers about his learning. But when I raised the issue of having an IEP, they told me that it wasn't necessary. Thinking back, with the benefit of hindsight, I think they saw Matt as manipulative (of me), and with a negative attitude to school; they didn't really consider that he had learning problems associated with his Asperger's. Once again, Matt wasn't on the Serious Disability Register, and therefore wasn't entitled to any aide assistance in class, and he 'wasn't disabled enough' for the staff to go to all the bother of preparing an IEP.

But, to be fair, I didn't make a big song and dance about getting him an IEP; I went with the flow and didn't make a fuss. And by the time that I realised how helpful an IEP would have been, Year 10 was drawing to a close.

So the following list is completely hypothetical. It contains things that I wish I had raised, for the IEP that I should have insisted upon:

- Provision of a safe, quiet place for Matt to de-stress, available at all breaktimes, and when he becomes overloaded in class. Along with a simple way for him to withdraw from class.
- Assignment work which recognises the limitations imposed by Asperger's Syndrome (factually-based rather than imaginative).
- Social learning with neurotypical students.
- Permission to answer maths questions without showing the working, as long as he can explain it when required.
- If information is displayed on a whiteboard, also provide it in another format (podcast, electronic whiteboard printout, web page etc.).
- Staff to advise room changes, substitute teachers, visitors to class, unplanned assemblies by email.
- When teachers assign work to be carried out in pairs or groups, they must organise an appropriate grouping for Matt.

Now some of these issues are perhaps less significant than others, but I believe they could all have played a part in reducing the difficulty of High School for Matt.

To be continued....

# The Zone

Social Club for High-Functioning ASD students across Grades 5 to 8  
Phone 1300AUTISM today to register your interest!



South, North (dates on Calendar 2012)  
North-West—watch this space for upcoming dates!  
Monthly club  
Limited numbers  
Parental support required  
Small fee to attend



**HURRY!**  
**Limited places**  
Book now to avoid disappointment



# Professor Tony Attwood

Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2012  
Tailrace Convention Centre Riverside  
Registration from 9:00am  
9.30am prompt start - 4.00pm



## Professor Tony Attwood

Tony is a clinical psychologist who has specialised in autism spectrum disorders since he qualified as a clinical psychologist in England in 1975. He works in private practice in Brisbane, but is also adjunct professor at Griffith University, Queensland. His book *Asperger's Syndrome – A Guide for Parents and Professionals* has sold over 350,000 copies and has been translated into over twenty languages. He has worked with over 6,000 individuals of all ages with Asperger's syndrome or an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Tony presents workshops and runs training courses for parents, professionals and individuals with Asperger's syndrome all over the world and is a prolific author of scientific papers and books on the subject. His latest book *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome* was published in October 2006.

## PROFESSOR TONY ATTWOOD WILL COVER THE FOLLOWING TOPICS:

### MANAGING FEELINGS: COGNITIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY TO MANAGE ANXIETY, SADNESS AND ANGER

The presentation explains why children and adults with Asperger's syndrome are more prone to develop mood disorders and also explains strategies that can help such individuals learn about and manage emotions.

The Cognitive Behaviour Therapy includes affective education and cognitive restructuring, i.e. improving the understanding of emotions and changing the way the person perceives and responds to emotions. The concept of an emotional toolbox is used to provide a greater range of strategies to manage feelings.

### MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR IN CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

The presentation focuses on children and adolescents with classic autism and provides an explanation and strategies with regard to repetitive behaviour, emotion management and the development of effective communication systems for emotions.

The application of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to children with severe autism is discussed and how it can be applied to such individuals.

The presentation will include strategies to help with self-injurious behaviour and the improvement of social understanding and coping with change.

Special Guest  
Co-Presenter  
Michelle Garnett

**Cost: \$180 (members \$145)**

**Become a member and save!**

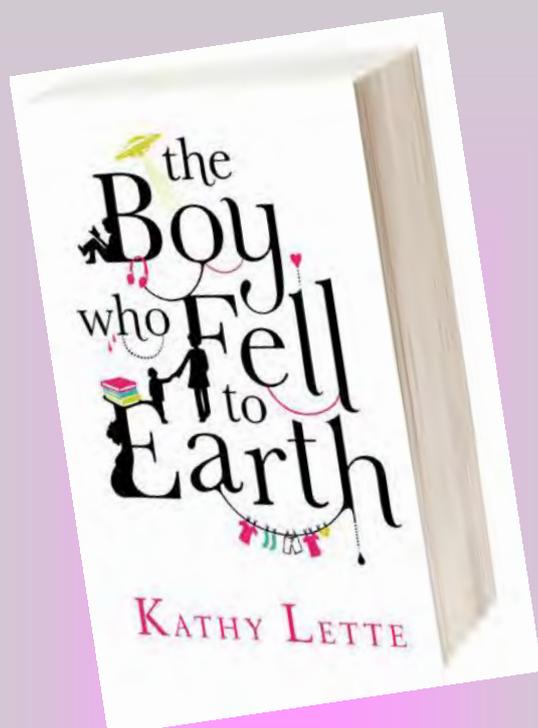
**\* Morning Tea and Lunch included \***

For more information please phone: 1300 288476  
or email: [admin@autismtas.org.au](mailto:admin@autismtas.org.au)



# The Boy who Fell to Earth

by Kathy Lette



Published March 2012 by Bantum Books

The Boy Who Fell to Earth is a novel by Australian writer Kathy Lette, who began her literary career as co-author with Gabrielle Cary of the iconic Australian proto-feminist book *Puberty Blues*.

The story has as its central characters Lucy, a single mother, abandoned by her husband and father of her son Merlin. Lucy wanted her son's name to make him special, different and make him noticed, then ironically, as a toddler, he is diagnosed as having Asperger's Syndrome. Merlin from thereon was indeed special.

The story is told from the mother's perspective and while Merlin is lying in a coma, at his bedside, Lucy begins to reflect on her son's life and recounts the highs and lows of being a parent of a child on the autism spectrum. It has humour, emotion and, I found, some very poignant moments. In general the author's writing style made it quite an easy read –it only took me a day-although some of her ironic or sarcastic asides did at times irritate and were often unnecessary.

Kathy Lette captures the vulnerability of a child with Asperger's in particular when the hero is waylaid in a local park by a paedophile, but she even manages to bring humour into dealing with this potentially traumatic event. She portrays the supporting characters well, Lucy's mother and sister who worry

about her celibacy, and Archie, who breezes into Lucy and Merlin's life from Australia. This character clumsily, and sometimes, in Lucy's eyes, irresponsibly, works on developing Merlin's independence, and, inadvertently brings romance back into Lucy's life. Then there's Jeremy, Merlin's absent father, who returns to try and make amends for abandoning Lucy and Merlin.

The story traces Merlin's development through adolescence to early adulthood and gives some inspired insights into the literal and perceptual foibles that are typically Asperger traits. At the launch of her book Kathy Lette revealed that her son Julius, now aged 21, was diagnosed with autism as a toddler, but she also made the point that this book is fiction and is not her story. However, some of the things Merlin says, and does, are undoubtedly drawn from the author's personal experience and included, with the approval of her son, after they had discussed it first.

I enjoyed this book and I would hope it goes some way towards understanding what parents and caregivers of children who are on the spectrum live with every day.

Reviewed by Dr. Judith Hudson



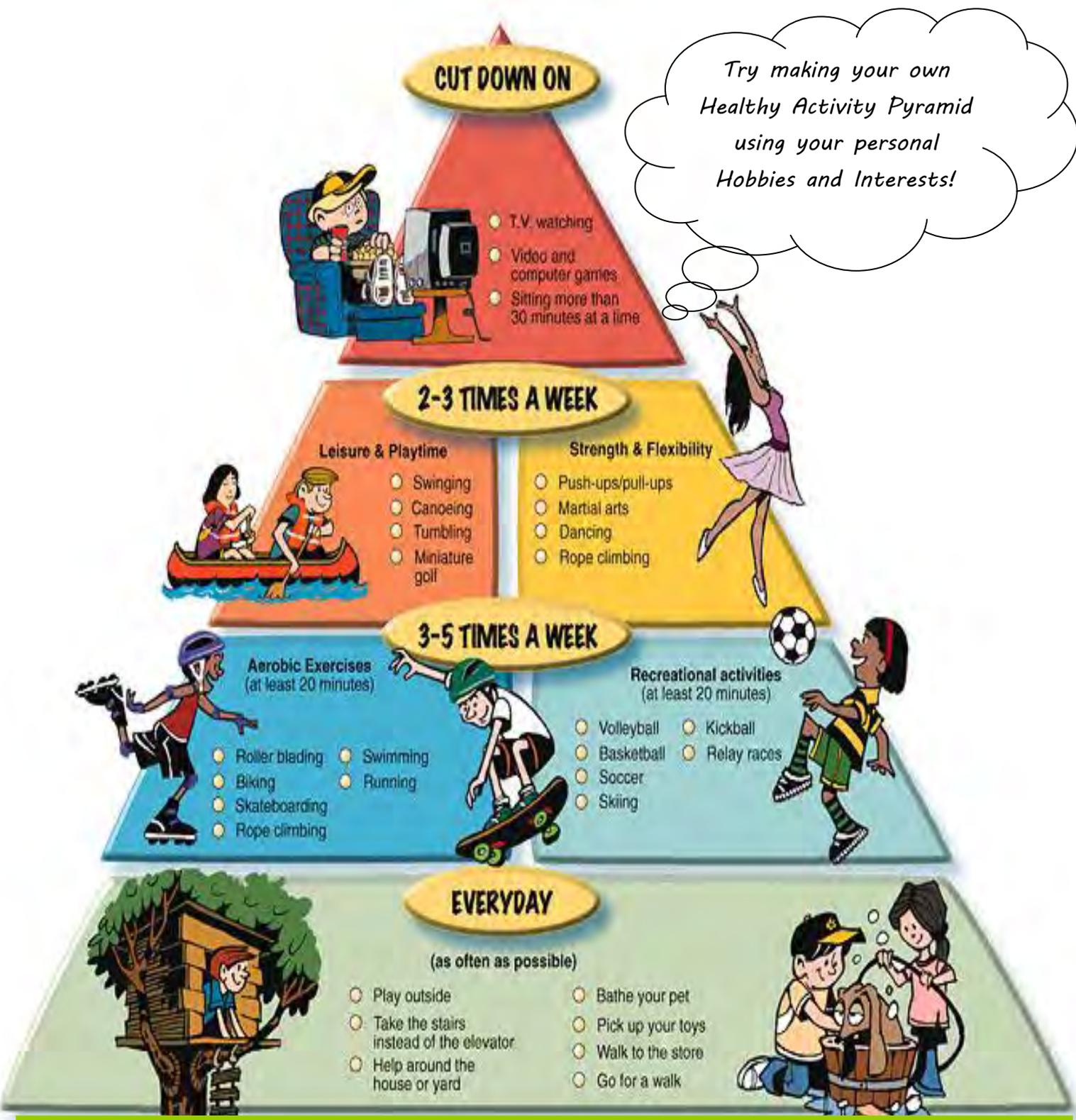
## Qantas donates to help our youngsters with autism!

Qantas recently had a morning tea, sold snacks to their staff and kindly donated the money to Autism Tasmania.

The money will be used to purchase games and resources for The Zone, a social club for children in Yrs 5 to 8.

This programme will provide a safe social environment for young people with autism to engage in their local community, share common interests and form friendships with other people of a similar age.

# Think Outside The Box



*Try making your own Healthy Activity Pyramid using your personal Hobbies and Interests!*

If you have any recipes, solutions to common problems, or clever sensory-friendly activities you would like to share in Spectrum News, please email them to: [jacqui@autismtas.org.au](mailto:jacqui@autismtas.org.au)

## September

5th September ASD PD (Launceston)  
 14th-16th September Brixhibition  
 Lego Exhibition  
 26th September ASD PD (Hobart)  
 Understanding Anxiety

## October

6th Saturday The Zone (Launceston)  
 10th Wednesday ASD PD (Launceston)  
 13th Saturday The Zone (Hobart)  
 31st Wednesday ASD PD (Hobart)  
 Social Skills

## November

3rd Saturday The Zone (Launceston)  
 10th Saturday The Zone (Hobart)  
 15th Thursday Tony Attwood & Michelle Garnett  
 Tailrace Convention Centre Riverside  
 Registration from 9:00am  
 9.30am prompt start - 4.00pm  
 Cost: Non-Members \$180 Members \$145

Become a member and save!

Morning Tea and Lunch included  
 For more information please phone: 1300 288476 or email: [admin@autismtas.org.au](mailto:admin@autismtas.org.au)

## December

8th Saturday The Zone (Launceston)  
 8th Saturday The Zone (Hobart)  
 12th Wednesday ASD PD (Launceston)

**Have you renewed your membership?**

Membership costs \$27.50 per year/ \$11.00 Concession

**Please contact  
 Autism Tasmania**



**Ph: 1300 288 476**

**or email**

**[admin@autismtas.org.au](mailto:admin@autismtas.org.au)**

### Spectrum News advertising rates

	Members	Non-Members
Full	\$90	\$130
Half	\$60	\$90
Quarter	\$40	\$70

Autism Tasmania is on Facebook, we include events either directly or indirectly related **to Autism on Facebook. 'Like us' to be updated regularly.**

*\*FaHCSIA funding is available to eligible families with children on the Autism Spectrum between the ages of 0-6 years. To discuss your child's eligibility please call your Autism Tasmania Autism Advisor.*

*\*Listing in the events calendar is a free service, we take no responsibility for inaccuracies or omissions. Inclusion does not imply endorsement of companies or events. Please contact the host of the event for more information.*

*For your event to be included please email [jacqui@autismtas.org.au](mailto:jacqui@autismtas.org.au)*