



Spectrum News

The Magazine of Autism Tasmania Inc.

ISSUE: December 2012



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Helping Children
With Autism Get
Ready For School



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**OUR NEW WEBSITE LAUNCHES ON
1ST JANUARY 2013**

Check it out!

www.autismtas.org.au

 Find us on
Facebook



Thinking Strategically

Autism Tasmania is very close to launching its' first ever strategic plan. This is particularly important during this time of change in the disability sector, with the imminent launch of the NDIS only a matter of months away.

Exactly what impact the NDIS will have on the sector is still unclear, however we do know there will be significant change and we need to define our purpose, streamline our resources and be clear about our vision and our mission.

Identifying our strategy or rather the overarching goals of the organisation has given us clearer direction and clarity of purpose. Our strategy is essentially our vision, what we want the future to look like. This naturally started with us asking the question WHY? Why are we here? What is our purpose? At Autism Tasmania we want the future to look bright for people with a diagnosis of Autism.

Our mission explains what our organisation actually strives to do. I'm proud to say that at Autism Tasmania we really do live our mission, it is a part of what we do every day. Our staff work collaboratively, strengthening partnerships to ensure we provide effective, quality support and sustainable programmes to enhance the future for people with autism and their families.

We value teamwork, therefore developing our strategic plan has been a collaborative and consultative process. We have gathered information from our staff, clients and the committee. The committee members have provided the strategic direction for the organisation by using the responses from all parties to inform our major goals. It was an insightful and affirming process in many ways. I feel we have achieved greater clarity and established a meaningful framework that shapes the work we do every day.

I'm delighted to say "Watch this space!" as I anticipate our strategic plan will be launched before Christmas, uploaded on our new website and ready for publication in the next issue of Spectrum News.



Andrea Brumby, CEO



The Hot Rod family day at Tolosa Park was fantastic and the Rumlbers Hot Rod Club were amazing. They had a BBQ, snacks, drinks, jumping castle, face painting, balloon art, hot rod rides and fairy floss for the families—all free! It was a wonderful day. Thank you kindly to Rumlbers Hot Rod Club and Robyn Davis who attended representing Autism Tasmania.



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.

To register your interest in future workshops or find out more, please contact Autism Tasmania at the details below:

Email:

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.

Professor Jacqui Roberts

Autism across the lifespan



Jacqui is nationally and internationally renowned for her research and expertise in the field of Autism. She is the chair of the Autism Centre of Excellence, an initiative at Griffith University. Prior to her appointment Jacqui was a consultant working on a variety of national projects in autism responsible for content in the Australian Autism Education and Training Consortium (AAETC) Positive Partnerships program. The Consortium provided professional development for teachers and school leaders and for parents and carers of children with autism across Australia as part of the Federal Government Helping Children with Autism package (2008 – 2012).

Jacqui has a background in teaching and in speech pathology and has worked in schools for children with autism as a teacher and principal. She was the Director of Services for The Autism Association of NSW (now Aspect) for many years. In 2009 Jacqui was the national speaker for Speech Pathology Australia and presented a 2 day workshop on autism, assessment and intervention for speech pathologists in all Australian states and territories.

In 2006 Jacqui completed (with Professor Margot Prior) a review of interventions for children with autism and their families for the Australian Commonwealth Department of Health and Aging. Jacqui is a consultant to Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community, Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) on the distribution of Federal Government Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) package, a director of the Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders and serves on the DEEWR Students with Disability in Schools Advisory Council.



Tattersall's Park Function
Centre, Glenorchy
9am prompt start- 4pm
11TH OF APRIL, 2013

COST \$125

**BOOK NOW AND SAVE
EARLY BIRD or
MEMBERS RATE
\$95 (ends February 1)**

Autism across the lifespan workshop

By Professor Jacqui Roberts BA (Hons), Dip. Teach, B Applied Science (Speech Pathology), Ph.D.

Session 1

Focus on diagnosis and the implications of the proposed changes in DSM 5.

Focus on functional assessment and implications for program development and for NDIS funding.

Session 2

Good practice in autism intervention across the age and ability range.

Making schools work for children on the autism spectrum.

Session 3

Focus on communication and autism across the age and ability range.

A holistic approach to understanding and responding to the communicative function of behaviour.

Morning Tea and Lunch included

**CONTACT AUTISM TASMANIA ON 1300 AUTISM
or email admin@autismtas.org.au**

Tony Attwood & Michelle Garnett Workshop

The recent Tony Attwood & Michelle Garnett workshop was attended by over 300 parents, caregivers, Disability Sector workers and adults with an ASD.

Tony and Michelle took turns presenting information and useful tips on the various aspects of managing behaviour and emotions. Tony's style of delivery was both informative and entertaining. Michelle presented a wealth of knowledge in a softly spoken and systematic manner, drawing on her vast experience in helping adults and children with an ASD through her work as the founder and Director of 'Minds & Hearts: A Specialist Clinic for Asperger's Syndrome and Autism.'

The presentation explained 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 use of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy was discussed.

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 was introduced to provide a greater range of strategies to manage feelings. Tony suggested setting up a personalised "toolbox" of strategies to deal with various strong emotions. For example, an anxious or angry child might bounce on the trampoline, or crush the boxes for recycling to utilise their heightened energy, and process their feelings. A child in need of calming down may colour in, play with a pet, or listen to relaxing music to unwind.

The presentation focused 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.

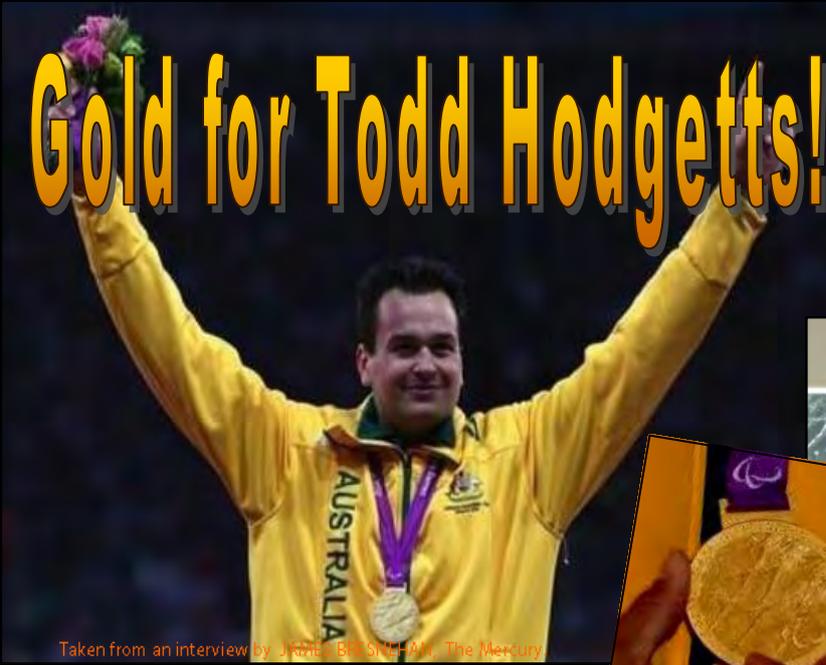
The application of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to children with severe autism was also discussed and how it can be applied to such individuals.

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

Autism Tasmania was very fortunate to book two of the biggest names in current therapies to present their ideas for a large Tasmanian audience. Feedback provided by those in attendance suggests that most found the workshop highly engaging and beneficial. Thank you to all who supported this wonderful learning opportunity.



Gold for Todd Hodgetts!



Taken from an interview by JIMIE BRESNAHAN, The Mercury



Above: Todd with some of the students he is inspiring at the Northern Support School

The first day of school is the first big social milestone in a child's life, but for Launceston-born Todd Hodgetts, it is a day he will never forget.

He was taunted, pushed around, and tied up with skipping rope. From that day, school did not get any better for the now 24-year-old Paralympic shot put gold medallist and world champion.

"I was a victim of bullying. It was awful, like a nightmare" recalled Hodgetts .

Hodgetts was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome when he was 8 years old. Asperger's Syndrome is an Autism Spectrum Disorder which is characterised by difficulties in social interaction.

He wasn't old enough to know exactly what it meant, but he knew it meant something bad. "That wasn't a good day," he said. "All I wanted was to be normal. When I got diagnosed it was one of the worst days of my life.

"I thought what's going to happen to me. "This stuff that they're writing in these reports, I don't think it's true and it hurts."

Luckily, he was good at sports. He was a good 100m sprinter and he played Aussie Rules in the school team.

At 14, Hodgetts gave up most of his sporting pursuits and decided that the shot put was for him.

At 17, Hodgetts made his first national team as a shot putter, and three years later he was the Australian under-23 champion (able-bodied).

For the past two years he has been a resident at the AIS in Canberra - living, eating and sleeping shot put - and this year won the national F20 (disabled) title with a world record throw.

This year, Hodgetts broke the world record and claimed the right to compete for Australia at the London Paralympics.

In a packed London Games stadium, Hodgetts had his golden moment, breaking the world record twice in 10 minutes, and with his final throw of 16.29m secured gold in the F20 (intellectual disability) shot put final.

"It was like a dream come true, a Hollywood movie," an elated Hodgetts said.

"Every time I grabbed that shot put, it was for everyone who ever doubted me and whoever gave me crap in my life," he said.

Even though the Rio Games in Brazil are four years away, Hodgetts has already decided that he will defend his Paralympic crown.

"It is my long-term goal to defend this title," he said. "My next goal is the world championships in France next year and that will put me in a good frame of mind. "There are more titles, more championships, more records out there. I've got to work on becoming a legend."

For Todd, the fight to prove himself will remain an ongoing battle.

"When I was about 15, I said to the psychiatrist who diagnosed me, I said: 'I'm cured now', Hodgetts said.

"The doctor said: 'I'm afraid you'll never be cured'.

"The more you tell me I have a disability and the more you bag me and tell me I can't do something, the more I want to prove you wrong.

"I'm going to be doing that for the rest of my life."

Todd has generously donated his uniform from the London Paralympics 2012 to Autism Tasmania. It will soon be on display in the office foyer to inspire others with an ASD to dream big, and pursue their talents. Thank you Todd!

Ride Tasmania for Autism Awareness

We want you... to be a valuable sponsor for an event that will help change the lives of many special children with Autism.

Who are we?

We are a family who has two young children diagnosed with Autism.

What, where & when is our event?

Our event "*Ride Tasmania for Autism Awareness*" begins on the 2nd of April 2013, World Autism Awareness Day. Departing from the Domain in Hobart, Clinton Taylor embarks on a journey to ride his bike around Tasmania via, Port Arthur, Bicheno, St. Helens, Launceston, Wynyard, Queenstown and returning to Hobart a fortnight later.

Why we are doing this?

Our two young sons, Brayden (aged 4) and Oliver (aged 3), have both recently been diagnosed with Autism. While difficult at times, the past few months have been an immense learning curve, supported by some amazing disability support professionals, we made great progress and see a bright future for our special & gifted children, but it has also highlighted the need for increased Autism Awareness within the community. This inspired us to give something back, to go the distance for Autism, to raise funds for Autism Tasmania, an organisation that supports many families within Tasmania during the highs & lows of the journey that is raising children with Autism. Our core value is Autism Awareness, to change the way people think & act towards individuals with Autism, to enlighten views & perceptions, to create understanding & acceptance.

How can you help?

- Make a donation to our *Everyday Hero* fundraising page on behalf of your organisation, your family or yourself as an individual.
- Share our "*Ride Tasmania for Autism Awareness*" Facebook page or *Everyday Hero* fundraising page with your client base or friends.
- Forward this page to other persons of who might be of interest.
Offer words of encouragement for our endeavour!!

Would you like more information?

Visit our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/RideTasmaniaForAutismAwareness>

View our *Everyday Hero* fundraising page:

http://www.everydayhero.com.au/clinton_taylor

Contact us:

Email: ridetasmaniaforautismawareness@gmail.com or

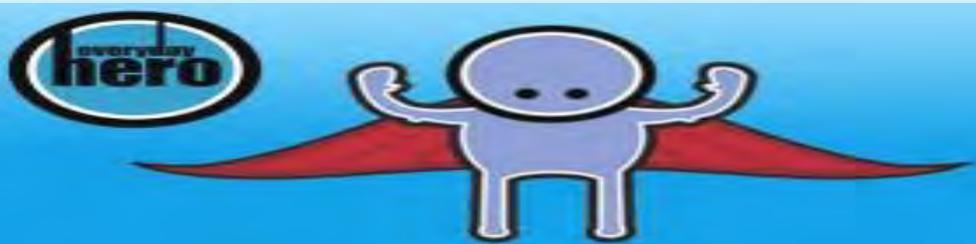
Phone: Crystal Taylor 0458075391 / Clinton Taylor 0488530629

Thank you!! Thank you!! Thank you!!

We sincerely thank you for your time, your consideration, your patience and your involvement in making the world a better place for families & children with Autism.

Your efforts however great or small, really are appreciated & do make a difference!!

Kind Regards, Clinton & Crystal Taylor.



Northern Support *Support Groups*

Our Northern Support and Information Groups have been continuing to meet regularly during terms 2 and 3. We had a break during the school holidays and enjoyed a family get together at The Bike Centre in Launceston. Considering the constant rain and a gloomy forecast the turn out to this regular school holiday activity was phenomenal! The children of eight families donned gum boots and rain coats and whizzed around happily while the rest of us enjoyed a hot drink and conversation under shelter.

Our George Town Support Group has been continuing to meet monthly at Wattle Group. Wattle Group is a great venue for this group as we have access to the toy room, enabling young children to attend with their parents. Our September meeting coincided with the school holidays, so families opted to skip this month. In lieu of our usual group meeting, individual home visits were offered.

We have had a number of guest speakers to our groups in the last few months. Dr Ceridwen Owen from the University of Tasmania attended our Launceston Coffee Morning to tell us about the research study she is undertaking with Damhnat McCann. Together they are exploring in detail, through the eyes of parents or primary carers, the home environment in the daily experience of caring for a child or children with ASD.

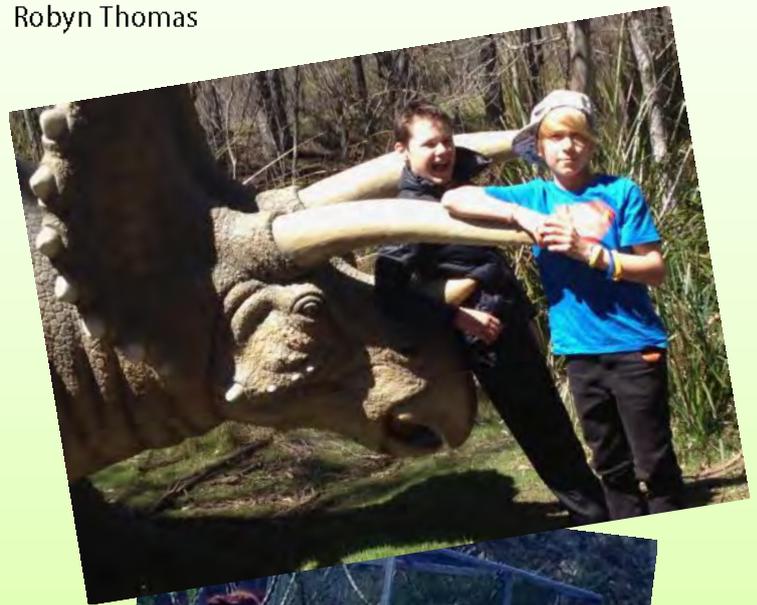
Mel de Clouet engaged parents at our Launceston Evening Support and Information Group in an informative and evocative discussion at our October meeting. Mel is the founder of Square Peg Education. She has a specific interest in gifted education and in creating a supportive learning environment for all types of learners. Her comments and suggested strategies with regards to the anxiety commonly experienced by children with ASD were particularly pertinent.

Thanks to the feedback from several local families, it was discovered that the original meeting time for The Dorset Support Group (Scottsdale) clashed with a number of other important local activities. The good news is that this Support Group has been relaunched. With the enthusiastic input from a couple of proactive parents, and the obliging assistance of several local service providers the juggling act is complete and a new time and day has been settled on! The group will meet monthly on the second Tuesday from 11am until 12:30 at the Dorset Community House in Scottsdale.

The Zone

October saw the launch of Autism Tasmania's latest support service in the form of The Zone. The Zone is an activity based social group for children with high functioning Autism and Asperger's Syndrome in Grades 5 to 8. Our first get together in Launceston welcomed some nervous and tentative children. Several games of Dodge Ball proved to be the key to turning the nervous energy into fun and laughter! During this first meeting The Zone members also discussed activities that they would like to see on the Zone Calendar for subsequent meetings. Tasmania Zoo, Mini Golf, drumming and dance workshops are just a few of the activities we can look forward to!

Robyn Thomas



Helping Children with Autism get ready for School

Preparing for school is a complex process when you have a child with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Planning for the transition to school should start as soon as possible.

Slow and steady - start slowly introducing all new school items, uniform, bag, lunch containers etc as early as possible. Change is hard for children on the autism spectrum, the first day of school is going to be a huge change so try to introduce as many things as you can before that day so that the child has a chance to become familiar and comfortable with them.

Practice, practice, practice – practice eating lunch out of our school lunch boxes, walking to school, wearing our uniforms. It also really helps to highlight any areas that may cause issues and gives you a chance to work on them in the safety of the familiar home environment.

In the weeks leading up to starting school, practice using your child's lunchbox and eating to the same timetable that he/she would at school.

Label everything – Toys, books, stationary, clothing, bags, shoes and anything else that is intended for school use.

Bag tags – incredibly helpful to promoting independence is a simple laminated bag tag that has a picture list of what your child needs to pack in their bag each day. While an adult is available at home to help pack the bag for school, your child may often be left to their own devices in the classroom to pack their belongings away. Practice doing this at home can also be beneficial; spatial awareness and understanding of how to fit things in the bag can be challenging to some children.

Build familiarity – visit the school, if you have permission from the school to access the grounds during the holidays then do so, have a picnic in the school playground, or walk/drive past the school on your way to other places. It does not have to be a big deal, nor even mentioned; just go past and let your child get used to seeing the school as a place that is part of their day, not something new or different.

Social stories & schedules – can be used to great effect to help prepare your child for starting school, knowing what is in store and what is expected of them.

Relax and stay calm – easier said than done ! It helps to remember that once the routine of school becomes an established part of life the anxiety levels will (hopefully) wind down. Make sure home is a quiet safe place for the children to unwind. Provide familiar snacks and activities that are calming. Use the time your child is at school to centre yourself so that when they return you are ready to focus on their needs.

Communication – this is not so much for your child as for yourself. It can be a very anxious time sending a child off to start school, especially if that child has special needs. Keep clear lines of communication open with your child's teachers and school principal. Written notes and emails that you can later refer back to if necessary. It is much harder to misinterpret or forget something that is in writing.

Good luck ! We hope the start of the school year goes as smoothly as possible for you and your family.

'Carly's Voice – Breaking Through Autism'

Written by Arthur Fleischmann with Carly Fleischmann

Published March 2012 by Touchstone Books

Author Arthur Fleischmann and his wife Tammy live in Toronto with their three children, Matthew and twins Taryn and Carly. At the age of two, Carly was diagnosed with severe autism and an oral motor condition that prevented her from speaking. The doctors who examined and worked with her told her parents that she would never develop intellectually beyond that of a small child.

Carly's early years were mayhem for her parents. This little girl slept very little and was very destructive when awake which necessitated her parents developing a plan where her father was 'on duty' during the night. Sensory sensitivities meant that Carly found bedding, clothing and many other 'ordinary' experiences at times unbearable resulting in uncontrollable, destructive meltdowns. With two other children in the family to care for, her behaviour had a huge impact on family life. The Fleischmann family were fortunate enough to be able to employ a number of therapists to work with Carly which gave both her parents some 'dedicated' time to spend with their other two children.

Although Carly made some slow progress after many years of intensive behavioural and communication therapies she remained largely 'unreachable' despite many well-known communication avenues having been tried through her speech pathologist.

At the age of ten, on one particularly difficult day working with her 'teachers', Carly confounded everyone by typing on her therapist's laptop the words, 'my teeth hurt'. What follows in the book is a story of a young girl gradually telling the people around her – sometimes painfully slowly – about her world and herself. After some considerable time of typing, and only when she felt like it, through email she slowly began to 'talk' with her father and many of those conversations are included in the book. They are insightful, poignant and amazing.

Gradually over many years Carly has expanded her ability to type and make her wishes known, the most important for her, to move from a school for children with additional needs to a mainstream high school.

Although Carly still struggles with all the aspects of autism her ability to describe what it is like for her now and what it was like in the early days is extremely enlightening, confronting and moving.

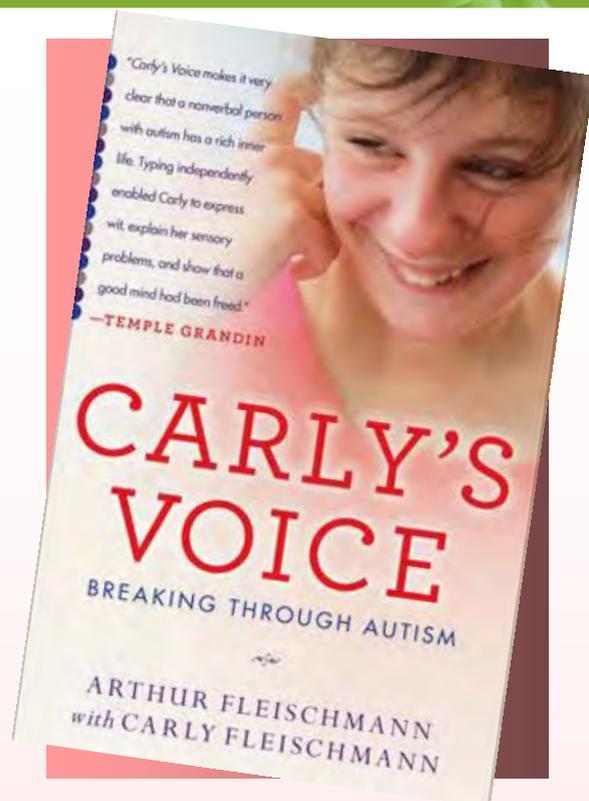
Carly's desire to write and tell others about autism has been realised through her family's hard work to educate the community closest to them and now a much wider audience.

Carly is currently attending a mainstream high school where she is enrolled in a number of classes, some for gifted students. This communicative young lady also corresponds with friends and followers via Facebook and Twitter. You can find her also on: www.carlyvoice.com

It's been a long time since I've read a book that has made me think so deeply about those people we love and care for who have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.

This book gives great credence to the words: 'Just because I can't talk doesn't mean I don't have anything to say.'

Rose Clark
Family Support – NW.



Young, emerging artist with incredible talent!

Keep an eye out for the artworks of Alison Kearsley, aged 23. Alison was recently diagnosed with Aspergers. We are honoured to showcase an emerging artist with such a wealth of talent. Pictured (left) are two of her pencil drawings. Her work shows incredible sensitivity to texture and form in rendering portraits that seem to almost leap from the page with hyper-realism reminiscent of the works of artist Chuck Close.



Above: Pencil drawing of a friend's baby showing Alison's ability to use the common graphite pencil to create something extraordinary.



Left: Pencil drawing of Kate Bush. Note the incredible details in the hair and skin texture. Alison has skilfully rendered the reflective shine in the eyes and lips— a skill many artists take years to master.

Homework and Handwriting

Homework

This story is not about a child on the Spectrum who starred at High School, or indeed who did well. As I gradually came to appreciate just how much Matt's characteristics did not fit the requirements of High School, I began to simply hope that we would both survive the experience, more or less in one piece. And any formal learning that he might pick up along the way would be a bonus.

Thankfully we did both come through the experience. But a major hurdle to Matt's school performance was homework. He did it, grudgingly, at primary school; whilst he was at High School I was doing University study so he saw me doing academic work at home every night; he had access to all the technology and information he could have required at home; and he was counselled and cajoled and eventually threatened by his teachers. But Matt saw school as school, and home as home, and he did not recognise any crossover between the two. As he saw it, schoolwork was for school and no place else. So, he simply would not do homework.

I thought in the beginning that Matt might have been anxious about the homework tasks, and would not attempt them for fear of not getting the work correct. So I tried to support him and build his confidence, and do the stuff that teachers call "scaffolding". All of which made absolutely no difference whatsoever. I eventually came to the realisation that I was unable to force Matt into doing homework, and found myself trying to explain his mindset to teachers – largely unsuccessfully.

There was only one instance during the four years of High School when Matt, of his own volition, came to me and asked if he could practice something for school. He did a cookery subject in Grade 10, and his teacher had asked the class to practice some knife skills at home. With much trepidation I sorted out what he needed, and Matt actually sat down and did the homework tasks. And was then commended in class, which was fantastic. But that experience reflected Matt's engagement with the task, his feeling of confidence in himself, and his respect for that particular teacher; regrettably those elements did not come together in other parts of his schooling.

So, I was pretty much a failure on the homework front (because good parents have children who do their homework). And I'm certain that the way most of Matt's teachers perceived him was negatively influenced by his refusal to do homework tasks. Looking back, I now think that I should have organised a free period at the end of each day, or even during lunchtime, for Matt to be able to do his homework at school. But hindsight's a wonderful thing.

Handwriting

As much as I love my son, I have to admit that his handwriting is outrageously terrible. I used to think that it was a secret sign that he would become a doctor, but it wasn't. It was just a sign that he couldn't write to save himself.

When he was young I noticed that his handwriting wasn't all that good, and tried to see if I could help. We had lots of activity books where he would trace over the letters and numbers, and we bought really groovy-looking pencils that were ergonomically designed. And his Dad ranted and raved at him about how important handwriting was. But none of that helped at all. When I asked his teachers about why this seemingly bright child had trouble putting pencil to paper, they just said 'It's a boy thing', and that I shouldn't stress about it.

When Matt got to High School however, handwriting started to become an issue. The teachers were telling me that Matt wasn't taking down the notes they had on the board, and wasn't completing the written work that they assigned in class. In fact, if a task involved writing a couple of paragraphs (either notes from the board or a textbook, or writing out answers to questions), Matt might only get two or three sentences completed in the time given. I was fairly sure he wasn't having difficulty with comprehension, or reading – to my on-going shame I thought that he might just be trying the teachers out, with passive laziness. Which led to lots of deep and meaningful discussions about the need to work hard at school, the duty he owed to teachers to do the work they set, and even some not-very-subtle bribes for finishing work on time. Again, none of this made a jot of difference.

After we got the diagnosis of Matt's Asperger's, it was strongly suggested by the school that I organise for Matt to have a fine motor skills "screening assessment" with an occupational therapist. Naturally, as with all assessments and consultations and specialist opinions, months went by before we were able to see anyone, and with each day my stress

levels rose. But this time, even though the news wasn't good, the therapist was quite positive about alternative approaches, so we came away from the assessment with a better understanding of Matt's challenges, and with ideas to help him overcome his handwriting deficits.

At age 14, Matt had the 'pencil control' of an eight year old. His fine motor skills were assessed as impaired: his hand and finger strength were below average, handwriting speed was low, his writing was poorly presented and he was quickly fatigued. This, combined with his low cognitive processing speed, meant that he had great difficulty with writing tasks. And the therapist advised that these difficulties are not at all unusual in children with Asperger's Syndrome. She suggested that, as Matt was motivated to use a keyboard, he should have a laptop or PC available to him throughout the school day, and be permitted to type rather than write his work.

When I took the therapist's report back to the school I sought information about any support that might be available – provision of a laptop, or a hire arrangement, or whatever they had done for other students in similar situations. And then came a thunderbolt which I don't think I will ever forget. The Special Needs teacher informed me that Matt "wasn't disabled enough to qualify for any assistance". His level of disability did not support his inclusion of the Severely Disabled Register, and so he was not entitled to any educational support. It was not especially that I was looking for the government to fund Matt's education, but the school was aware that he had real, diagnosed difficulties with his learning (of which handwriting was just one), and the whole burden of supporting him in mainstream education was put back on me. I truly felt that it wasn't in any way a partnership between our family and the school – all the responsibilities and obligations fell on me as Matt's parent.

So, I bought him a laptop, and he used it in class, and that overcame the problem of actually putting down the words, although the difficulty in processing the visual information from the whiteboard into keyboard strokes remained.

Orientation and Organisation

Organising stuff

As much as I love my son to pieces, even I am forced to admit that when it comes to his personal organisation, he is a wonderful cook. When anything relates to his area of personal interest, he's not great but he manages to find things eventually; the same

cannot, however, be said of the rest of his life. If I was to ask Matt right now to put his hand on his wallet, a comb, a pen or his camera, I very much doubt if he could locate even one of those items. And would he give a damn? Absolutely not. For Matt, if it doesn't relate to his passion (computers and gaming) then it holds no interest for him, and things will simply lie where they fall, or where Mum puts them.

From speaking to other parents it seems that this is not terribly unusual for children on the Spectrum. I'm suspect that I'm probably a rubbish parent, because I allow Matt to get away with not thinking about this mundane stuff – but I have found that, for us, it's not worth having a row about. I have been unable to change his mental approach, and fighting about where things are, or should be, is a waste of my energy and has little or no impact on Matt. Of course, other families, with other children, will all be different.

But when it comes to High School, every student, on or off the Spectrum, needs a basic level of organisation if they are going to make it through the day in one piece. When Matt started High School I duly purchased all the books and bibs and bobs and put his name on everything that one could put a name on, stuck it all in his backpack, sent him off with all the other new students, and thought 'Yes, my work here is done'. Oh the naivety! It was only when I started to get notes from teachers, saying that Matt was coming unprepared to class, that I began to suspect that all was not well in the area of personal organisation.

I had simply assumed that Matt would be like all the other kids and sort out some organisation in this locker so that he could find the books and things he needed for each class. Such assumptions are my undoing – was it Jiminy Cricket who said something really corny about 'ASSUME makes an ass of you and me'? Well, it does of me, anyway. I just took it for granted that Matt would manage, and he didn't, and he didn't even tell me that he was having trouble with his books and stuff, because he thought it would upset me. And I was upset – not at him, but at myself for being such an unthinking clot.

So, the weekend that this all came out, we had a long talk about what things might make it easier for him to get to his classes, on time, and with the right gear. And we made a list (unlike my son, I am a compulsive list-maker and crosser-offer), together, because I figured there was no point at all us implementing organisation strategies if Matt was not involved in working out what those strategies would be. Then we had an exciting trip to the Stationery Superstore, where we filled a trolley with all sorts of groovy organising stuff, as selected by Matt.

system). Our reasoning was based on the following:

It doesn't work for an individualized timetable, unless the student is going to be at school every day for Home Room (which Matt wasn't).

It labels the student as different, and disabled - even if it's only themselves attaching the label.

Matt's anxiety about having classes in different rooms was so serious that, if he thought there might be a room change, he could not get out the front door, never mind make it to school. We had to deal with room changes before leaving home, otherwise the whole day would be written off. Thankfully Matt had the one of the most lovely and patient teachers for Grades 9 and 10, and she was very understanding when I would call for an update on substitute teachers, room changes and unexpected assemblies.

Just to follow up that bit about individualised timetables, Matt ended up attending school for about 60% of the time. This meant that he would start and finish at odd times, and would very rarely be present for the entire school day. But naturally, for safety and security reasons, the school staff needed to know when he was present and when he had left (all their duty of care stuff). But was Matt prepared to go to the Office every day to sign in and out again? No way! He came to school to go to class, so that is exactly what he did, and no reminders or requests from me caused any deviation from his mission.

Quite honestly, I thought I had more serious things to worry about than getting Matt to sign in and out (see what a bad parent I am?), so I didn't stress too much about it. But then I started getting Please Explain letters from the school, listing every date during the term, and stating that Matt was not signed in as present for any of them. He had been present, mostly, but hadn't been marked off at Home Room or on the sign-in sheet. So I had to explain all this long list of so-called absences, which took ages, was a real nuisance and made me feel guiltier than usual for not doing the right thing.

I eventually gave in and swallowed my fast-disappearing dignity and came to an arrangement with the office staff, whereby I would go to the office each morning after I dropped Matt off for class, and sign him in - that at least stopped the absenteeism nastygrams. I still think that it shouldn't have been my obligation to keep their paperwork in order, and surely Matt's teachers could have marked his presence on their computers. But sometimes, I think that it's better for everybody if you go with the flow and just do

what the system wants, allowing you to build up some credit for use in a more important battle.

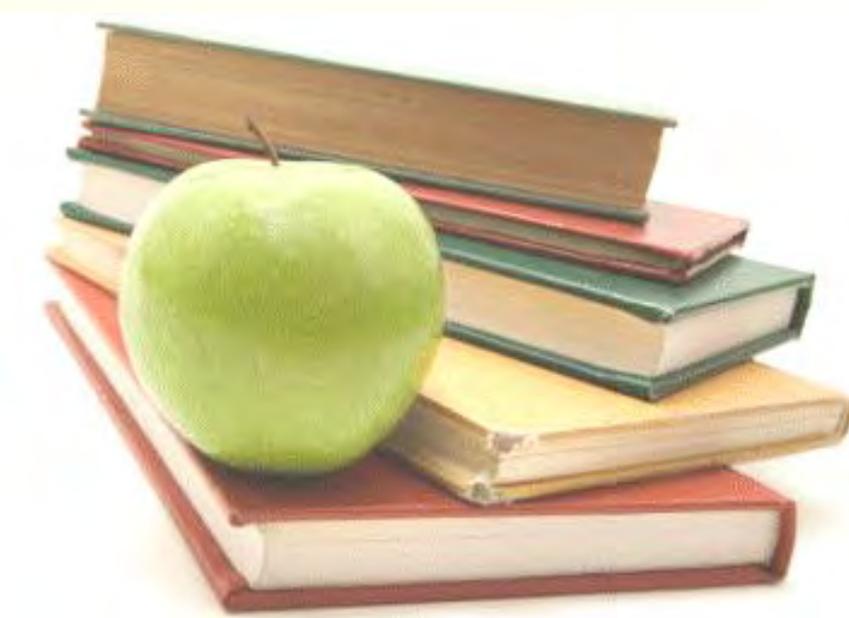
Orientation

This is an issue which is closely related to personal organisation, and is one which was just as important to the mental health and well-being of our family. It seems screamingly obvious to me that a student, who has recognised difficulties with change and uncertainty, as well as with the social melee that constitutes High School, is likely to benefit from a calm and quiet orientation to the school at the beginning of the year. This would involve meeting the student's teachers, visiting his or her classrooms, locating new offices, storerooms and so on, before the school buildings are over-run with students making mayhem.

But it wasn't similarly obvious to the staff at Matt's school. Each year, I would play phone tag, trying to contact a senior teacher, then pleadingly put my case for a half hour visit before school recommenced. And each year there would be a discussion, and humming and harring, and getting back to me, until someone made the brave decision that we could visit and check things out.

For such a minor inconvenience to a teacher, these orientation visits made a significant difference to Matt's attitude to starting the school year. It was a simple means of bringing down his anxiety about all the new things, took minimal resources and made him feel so much more comfortable because he knew where he had to be, and when, and which teacher to look for. This was a battle, for us, that was well worth fighting.

To be continued...



BRIXHIBITION SUCCESS!



Brent Prins, a dedicated member of TAZ-Brick Collectors Club, made a presentation to Autism Tasmania, of the funds raised through Brixhibition 2012.

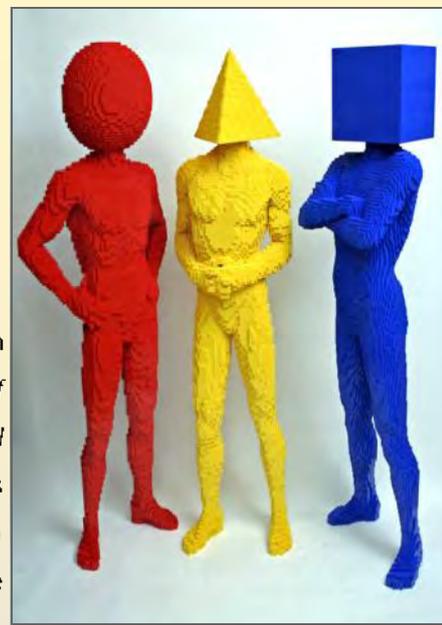
Brixhibition was held over three days during September 2012 with brick enthusiasts and the community supporting this highly successful event. People of all ages were enthralled by the attention to detail by the creations displayed. It was evident there had been hours of commitment by Brent Prins and his team in pulling together a very impressive exhibition.

Autism Tasmania would like to thank the amazing and dedicated members of TAZ-Brick Collectors Club in partnership with the Glenorchy Lions Club, and brick enthusiasts and the community who supported Brixhibition 2012. The funds will assist in the delivering of quality programs which support people with autism and their families.



Therapeutic benefits of LEGO

Independent research published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorder* demonstrates LEGO toys may be able to help children who have autism overcome social interaction difficulties.



Featured works by LEGO artist Nathan Sawaya

The research, carried out by the Cambridge Autism Research Centre in 2007, looked at the use of LEGO Therapy and the Social Use of Language Programme as social skills interventions for 6-11 year old children with autism. The results showed that the LEGO therapy group made significant progress.

LEGO is a highly structured, predictable and systematic toy. It is therefore likely that children with High Functioning Autism and Asperger's Syndrome will be motivated by tasks involving this toy, due to the fact that individuals with autism are particularly attracted to systems (Baron-Cohen 2002, 2006; Baron-Cohen et al. 2003). The appeal of systems has been used to motivate children to improve their emotion recognition skills (Golan and Baron-Cohen 2006). Adapting LEGO building to help children improve social interactions therefore seems justified. In fact, Dewey et al. (1988) found that after rule-governed games, construction materials (LEGO is an example of a construction material) were the next most effective means of facilitating complex social interactions in pairs of children with autism in contrast to dramatic play and functional play.

Learn more about LEGO Therapy Research – Search for “Long-term outcome of social skills intervention based on interactive LEGO® play (by Daniel B. LeGoff & Michael Sherman) and “LEGO® Therapy and the Social Use of Language Programme: An Evaluation of Two Social Skills Interventions for Children with High Functioning Autism and Asperger Syndrome” (by Gina Owens, Yael Granader, Ayla Humphrey & Simon Baron-Cohen)

Mind Moves Chess Club



A CHESS CLUB FOR ALL KIDS
(5-18yrs) with a special invitation to GIFTED,
AUTISM SPECTRUM and ADHD kids

Venue: Windsor Community Precinct Health and
Wellbeing Centre, Community Hall- Area 3,
1 Windsor drive, RIVERSIDE.

When: Monday's during term time

Time: 6pm – 7pm

Chess has many proven benefits (Academically,
Socially). If you think your child might benefit, please
come along.
Coaching is offered to beginners, intermediate and
more advanced skilled players.

You need to check this mate!!



Comments from parents:

"I would like to thank the man who has been helping the beginners for the past two weeks (not sure of his name). My daughter knew nothing of the game prior to attending has learnt a lot in such a short time and is developing an enthusiasm for the game. She has started her own notebook where she writes down what she learns each week and draws diagrams to go with the notes. Well done on starting the club - there was a need for it in Launceston"

"This is a great idea and a great club!"

"Chess club came to him at a time when he didn't fit into school very well, and his confidence was dropping rapidly. The moment he started chess club his confidence switched, he found something that he was good at, which also had approval of others. And, it tapped into his way of thinking. I couldn't be more thankful :-)"

"Thank you for what you are doing for our children!"

"My daughter didn't want to come at first, but after her first evening at chess club, she was hooked. She love playing chess and she love coming on a Monday"

Mind Moves Chess club started on the 28th of June and since then has grown rapidly. We now have on average 29 children attending the club every Monday. The children's enthusiasm is infectious. It is heart-warming to see them so happy and content. For the organizers of Mind Moves Chess Club it has been a steep learning curve, but worth every minute of hard work.

Every Monday when the club gets together, I am reminded why we started the club in the first place. I am astonished by how the club is transforming our children. Many of them arrived unsure, shy and reluctant to interact. After only a few visits they are full of conversation, confident and have made great friends. This was our big vision for the club – that it will teach kids the amazing game of chess and stimulatingly equip them with coping skills and strategies for life. We want to use chess as a vehicle to teach them valuable social skills and cultivate self-confidence. I would never have thought that we would see results so quickly. A number of our children has participated in tournaments over the last couple of weeks and have done startlingly well. Mind Moves Chess Club's very own fun tournament will take place on club evenings from the 19th of November until the 3rd of December, inspired by the children themselves! I couldn't be more proud of each and every one of the children!

We are trying to reach as many children as possible that might benefit from this opportunity. There are still spaces available, so please do not hesitate to come along or contact us for further information.

Warm Regards,
Dawida Rose-Nel
President: Mind Moves Chess Club Incorporated



Mind Moves contact details and enquiries:
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Web: www.mindmoves.info
www.facebook.com/MindMovesChessClub





10 IDEAS FOR A HAPPY CHRISTMAS!

The very things that many 'neurotypical' people enjoy about the festive season and similar celebrations are the things that some people with autism find difficult.

1. Look at the world of Christmas through your child's eyes.

What aspects of Christmas would he enjoy? Incorporate one of these into their daily schedule, plan a series of 'daily Christmas activities' that your other children could either observe or do alongside him/her.

2. Which aspects of Christmas would overload your child and which might be avoided?

If the Christmas Tree in the living room causes sensory overload, then set up the Christmas tree in a separate room, for example, your bedroom. If your other children have separate bedrooms from your child with ASD, they could perhaps decorate their bedrooms and make them the Christmas zones in your house, rather than communal areas, such as the living room. This will greatly reduce any sensory overload and anxiety about the Christmas changes in your house.

3. Give him some Christmas-free time on your child's schedule each day.

This can be helpful for you to observe his/her level of anxiety and make any adaptations you need to preparations for the rest of the day.

4. Receiving presents can be overwhelming and confusing for people with autism.

One idea would be to introduce toy time on your child's daily schedule and put out a new toy next to a favourite toy. This way your child isn't overloaded with new toys all in one go. Consider leaving them unwrapped, unless your child specifically likes the sensation of unwrapping presents. Try giving your child one new toy a day, instead of giving your child all their presents at once. You could introduce a time/activity symbol on their schedule each day, when they can play with a new toy.

5. Use advent calendars to help you get through the Christmas period.

The advent calendar could help your child be aware of upcoming events and prepare your child for daily changes. You could have a photo of a trip you are going to make and show them how many days (or, as some people say, sleeps) until you will be visiting this place. It can be used to show home days and school days to prepare for the end-of-term.



6. Give your child quiet time with a favourite activity at key moments for your other children, such as when they are opening their presents.

Could your child with ASD play on the computer or watch a favourite DVD in a Christmas-free zone at these times?

7. Utilise friends and family at key Christmas moments.

When your other children want to write Christmas letters, practise for their Christmas plays or decorate the tree (and if your child doesn't wish to be involved in these activities), ask a friend to watch your child undertaking a favourite activity eg, playing on the computer. Or you might want to watch your child while grandparents or friends undertake Christmas activities with your other children.

8. Liaise with school. Ask your child's teacher how he or she prepares your child for Christmas.

Try to incorporate the same strategies and symbols at home. By trying to keep them the same, your child may be less anxious. If you use different symbols and strategies, he may think school Christmas and home Christmas are two different things and become doubly-overloaded!

9. Christmas Day

Whatever Christmas period changes you have introduced, don't change them on Christmas Day. Keep their schedule the same as far as possible. It is important to think about Christmas changes as early as possible and then try to prepare your child for these. You could have six pictures of their bed and then a photo of the relative who is coming to stay: six sleeps and then Nana comes, for example. Each day you could remove or cross through one of the pictures of the bed.

10. Father Christmas

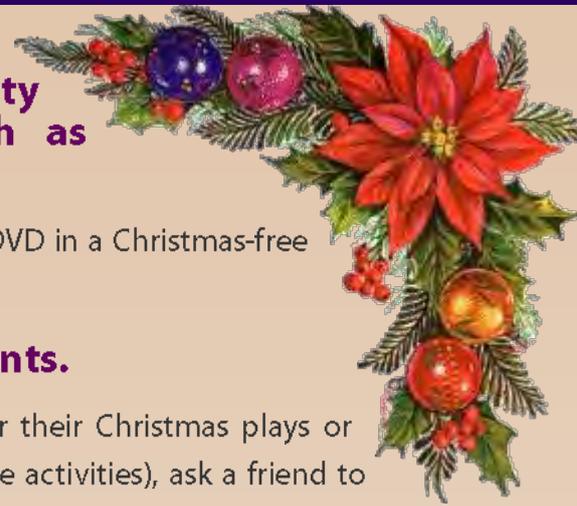
Sometimes the sight of a man dressed as Father Christmas can make children on the autism spectrum scream and run in the opposite direction. If you are taking your child to a Christmas event, it may be wise to prepare your child for the fact they might see a man dressed in a red suit by showing a photo of a man dressed in a Santa suit.

Good planning and no surprises:

Remember when putting up decorations that it is very important to involve the person, even if they don't want to put them up themselves. Doing it within eye-shot, or making them aware in another way that it is happening, is important. Returning home to find a tree in the middle of the room can be a bit of a shock!

Also, if your child is becoming obsessive about Christmas, you might try to set boundaries around the obsession. For further information, follow the link below to read the National Autistic Society, UK's recommendations on dealing with obsessive, repetitive behaviours and routines.

<http://www.autism.org.uk/Living-with-autism/Understanding-behaviour/Obsessions-repetitive-behaviours-and-routines.aspx>



Think Outside The Box

How To Make Rainbow Bubble Snakes KIDS LOVE!!



Summer is here. When thinking of activities to fill the long daylight hours, consider making some Rainbow Bubble Snakes!

Simple, easy and made with materials from around the house. Perfect! All you need is an empty water bottle from your recycling, rubber band or duct tape, a sock that is missing its match (which we all seem to have an abundance of), dish washing soap and some food colouring.

Start by cutting the bottom of the water bottle off. Next slide the sock over the bottom of the bottle. We used a rubber band to secure our sock, but you could use colourful duct tape instead.



Sponge Water Bombs



1. Cut sponges into strips
2. Mix colours
3. Tie middle with cable tie, string or rubber bands
4. Soak in a bucket of water
5. Enjoy!!!



New Year's Eve idea:



Place Glow-Sticks inside soda bottles for Glow-in-the-dark bowling



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



Turn gingerbread cookies upside down to ice as Reindeers!

THE SUNSCREEN SONG

Sing to the Bitty Spies-lyrics by Jane Mayberry- pics by Mayer-Johnson Boardmaker

Put on your sunscreen,
Summer time is HOT!



Put on your sunscreen.
Don't miss a single spot.



Face, neck, and legs,
And back and chest and arms.



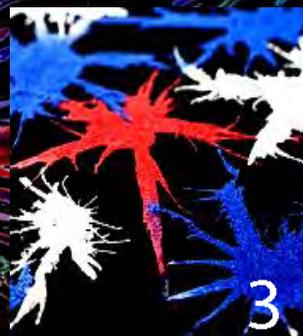
If you don't want a sunburn
Put your sunscreen on!



The staff & committee of
Autism Tasmania wish you all a
Merry Christmas
& a Happy New Year!



New Year's Eve Fireworks paintings in 3 easy steps:



1. Blow diluted paint onto black card with straw
2. Sprinkle glitter on wet paint
3. Display your work of art!

January

- 12th The Zone (South)***
- 20th The Zone (North West)***
- 26th The Zone (North)***
- 27th Support & Information Group - Hobart**
Asperger's Syndrome Adult Support Group (Contact Rose Clark)
- 28th Support & Information Group - Burnie**
(Contact Rose Clark)
- 30th Support & Information Group - Hobart**
For Parents/Carers of school aged children (Contact Robyn Davis)
- 30th Family Sausage Sizzle - Launceston**
(Contact Robyn Thomas)

February

- 1st Support & Information Group – Dunalley**
(Contact Robyn Davis)
- 2nd Support & Information Group – Launceston**
Asperger's Syndrome Adult Support Group (Contact Rose Clark)
- 7th Support & Information Group- Bridgewater**
(Contact Robyn Davis)
- 7th Support & Information Group– Hobart**
(Contact Robyn Davis)
- 9th The Zone - South***
- 12th Support & Information Group - Scottsdale**
(Contact Robyn Thomas)
- 16th The Zone - North***
- 17th The Zone - North-West***
- 20th Support & Information Group - George Town**
(Contact Robyn Thomas)
- 20th Support & Information Group - Launceston**
(Contact Robyn Thomas)
- 21st Support & Information Group - Circular Head**
(Contact Rose Clark)
- 24th Support & Information Group - Hobart**
Asperger's Syndrome Adult Support Group (Contact Rose Clark)
- 25th Support & Information Group - Burnie**
(Contact Rose Clark)
- 26th Support & Information Group - Launceston**
Coffee Morning (Contact Robyn Thomas)
- 27th Support & Information Group– Hobart**
For Parents/Carers of school aged children (Contact Robyn Davis)

March

- 1st Support & Information Group – Dunalley**
(Contact Robyn Davis)
- 2nd Support & Information Group – Launceston**
Asperger's Syndrome Adult Support Group (Contact Rose Clark)
- 9th The Zone (South)***
- 10th The Zone (North West)***
- 12th Support & Information Group - Scottsdale**
(Contact Robyn Thomas)
- 14th Support & Information Group- Bridgewater**
(Contact Robyn Davis)
- 14th Support & Information Group– Hobart**
(Contact Robyn Davis)
- 15th Support & Information Group - Circular Head**
(Contact Rose Clark)
- 20th Support & Information Group - George Town**
(Contact Robyn Thomas)
- 20th Support & Information Group - Launceston**
Evening Meeting (Contact Robyn Thomas)
- 25th Support & Information Group - Burnie**
(Contact Rose Clark)
- 26th Support & Information Group - Launceston**
Coffee Morning (Contact Robyn Thomas)
- 27th Support & Information Group– Hobart**
For Parents/Carers of school aged children (Contact Robyn Davis)
- 31st Support & Information Group - Hobart**
Asperger's Syndrome Adult Support Group (Contact Rose Clark)

*The Zone is a Social Club for High-Functioning ASD Students across Grades 5 to 8



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 more information contact us on Facebook