

Aspergers Syndrome Support Group for Families in Macarthur

April News Sheet

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April Meetings

We had a few new, a few familiar faces attend on **Thursday night**, and again we had a lively discussion on a range of topics facing families represented. Employment was an issue discussed with the difficulty of employees and employment services understanding the needs of young people with aspergers. Whilst there is a network of employment services that can assist people who have a disability, the system is complex, often focused on moving people through without necessarily finding the right position, and constantly changing.

However, there is no reason why people who have aspergers can not pursue the line of work they are interested in – often finding the interest is the hard part. Many types of work are suited for people with Asperger's characteristics, employers need to be adaptable and be clear about what needs to be done.

On **Wednesday morning**, we had more kids than parents given that it was school holidays. With the kids settled around their own table we "grownups" enjoyed a coffee and a chat on the world involving aspergers. The families present highlighted the wide range of experiences people who have aspergers encounter and the different reaction by people within their families experience. The need for support from extended family members and friends is important both to understand what is happening and for the future of children or young people.

Meetings for May

- **Second Wednesday 9th May** 10am at Pete's Café – behind The Advertiser newspaper office at the Macarthur Mall end of Queen St.
- **Second Thursday 10th May** 7pm at the Harrington Park Community Centre Fairwater Dr next to the shopping centre

Coming along to meetings is a great way of meeting other families dealing with similar issues to you, and is an opportunity to hear other people's viewpoints on issues you are facing or could face in the future. I am always learning something new each time families come together and I hope that others are too.

Why not come along in May if you have not been for a while?

Legal Advice – via ASPIA Newsletter

For those on our list who are needing advice in relation to their personal situation, several of us within ASPIA have recently set up a good connection with a large law firm in Sydney (with links to Melbourne & other large country locations). The Managing Director has committed to educating his firm in relation to Asperger's Syndrome and has received a great deal of information from us, including links to some Articles on AS & Legal matters.

We will soon be listing their details on our website, but in the meantime you can contact Frank Egan at LAC LAWYERS, Sydney 1300 799 888, email: corporate@lac.com.au Make sure you mention Asperger's Syndrome and **ASPIA**.

Autism Awareness Expo

12th May at Macquarie University starting from 9.00 am

The Expo will feature presentations by leading Australian professionals and service providers who will talk about the process of diagnosis and discuss effective therapy options. The exhibition area will have stalls on everything from education, therapists, counselling, schools, books, resources and much more. If you are interested in Autism Spectrum Disorder and want information on current issues and effective treatments – the Expo is not to be missed.

There is no cost to attend – gold coin donation would be appreciated on the day. More information may be found on their web site www.autismawareness.com.au

NOTE Information taken directly from the Expo web site

Sue Larkey presenting in Campbelltown

Sue is once again presenting her great talk on **Teaching Strategies and Behaviour Support** for children with Autism and Aspergers at the Campbelltown Golf Club on the 29th May. Many teachers and parents have benefited from her presentation, which gives some great down to earth strategies and ideas. She also has a number of resources available to purchase, some of which have found their way into our resource library.

The cost of the day is \$95 inclusive of lunch, notes and handouts, with parents able to apply for a discounted cost through Sue's office. Contact her either at www.suelarkey.com.au or on 0433 660 379. **Why not encourage a teacher from your school to attend?**

At the April meeting I handed out a newsheet from Sue titled *Being Mr Perfect and teaching students to make mistakes*. A few things covered were:

- Perfection is not only impossible to maintain it can lead to problem behaviours
- Although most people like the thought of perfection few of us ever achieve it
- Encourage your child to realise that everyone makes mistakes sometimes. Show them you make mistakes and how you can resolve it – everything is not a disaster that they imagine it will be.
- Show them your coping skills in dealing with mistakes
- Don't get angry when others make mistakes – be a good role model

You can get a free copy of Sue's newsletter through her web site.

Web Sites of Interest

Nearly every month I come across a new website or contact re Aspergers or the wider disability field. Remember not to just seek information on Aspergers – look at the specific issues that are affecting the family or the person who has aspergers eg anxiety, nonverbal communication, friendship, employment. Also the information and ideas you find could be passed on to teachers at your child' school – help them help your child in partnership together.

www.pellicantalk.com has a number of resources, some for free, on autism disorder spectrum including visual pictures and

www.immortalbooks.com.au has a number of books on aspergers and related matters. Discounts may be available to parents.

www.aibida.com is an interesting site that provides a communication management tool for parents dealing with a range of therapist and educators. Enables all concern to share information and communicate on line. May be worthwhile for those more savy computer individuals – that's not me!

Please let me know if you come across a website or resource that other families would be interested in.

Tony Attwood on the ABC

Whilst four of our family members of the Support Group are off to hear Tony speak in June, I by chance heard him speak on ABC702 radio this week as part of their Conversation Hour. It was very interesting to hear how he become so passionate about autism and especially aspergers, and his very straightforward explanation of how to assist people who have aspergers learn and cope.

Here is what is written on the ABC web site about his talk Source www.abc.net.au

When Tony Attwood was a student teacher, a little five-year-old girl called Sarah came up and pushed him on a swing. Sarah had autism, and her simple act led Tony to his life's work - and today he's the world's leading expert in Asperger's Syndrome.

Asperger's is a form of autism. People with Asperger's can converse and live in the world, but they see it through very different eyes. For years it was misunderstood and its appearance in a child was blamed on the mother. Tony Attwood has done more than anyone to clear up that profound misunderstanding and has taken us much closer to the truth of what Aspergers really is. His latest book 'The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome' was published last year.

Tony's connection and sympathy for those with autism and Asperger's stems from his own his own early years. "As I was growing up I really benefited from friendship and found other people not only interesting, but I wanted to get to know all about them... When I met those with autism and Asperger's who couldn't do this I felt very sorry for them - that they were missing out on one of the key aspects of life."

People with Asperger's can't read boredom - which can lead to some interesting misunderstandings. "They won't notice the, 'this is boring, this is tedious, I have somewhere else to be' - or embarrassment too, because of what they're talking about. Once you press the button 'play' it just continues. They have a compulsion for closure, they've got to give you everything, so they'll even follow you to the toilet. They'll think that this topic is entrancing. It is to them - but not to everyone else."

Those with Asperger's Syndrome also have a great sense of social justice. "These are the guys who will donate most of their salary to the starving, but it's some of the more subtle inter-personal needs in family members and colleagues, that they often miss."

Tony believes people with Asperger's can be very kind. "There's confusion in understanding people, but there's very definitely kindness. When I meet those with Asperger's Syndrome who are married and I ask their partner, 'When you fell in love with your silent, handsome stranger, what was it about him that caused you to fall in love?' There are many reasons, but one of them is kindness."

Tony's own wife has described him as 'single-minded, mildly eccentric and dedicated to the good of humanity' - but he denies that he has any form of Asperger's himself! "No, I'm British! And the British have understood eccentricity. In any other country, if you are interested in toilet brushes, or collecting old washing machines, you're referred to a psychiatrist. In Britain, they make a documentary about you and call it the *Antiques Roadshow!*"

You can get a copy of Tony's conversation with the ABC presenter Richard Fidler by going to the ABC web site and searching for Richard Fidler. You can get it as a Pod cast or a transcript I believe - a bit technical for me!. Have to ask a young person to help me with this I think.

TAFE Student

A student undertaking Early Childhood Education at Campbelltown TAFE has approached me to undertake work on the Support Group as part of her final term assignment. It entails research into Aspergers Syndrome and the support group, and an evaluation of how people have found the group in meeting their needs. A short questionnaire is being developed for people to respond to in early May and returned for her use.

Due to the short timeframe the student is working with, the evaluation will only be sent out to people on our e-mail list and responses returned by email. It would be appreciated if people could assist the student with her work to give her a greater understanding of the needs of families and support groups within communities. Thanks

Until next time

Bob Lester

Contact 4648 1593 or 0400 481 520 or email fip@ispdr.net.au