

**Aspergers Syndrome Support Group
for Families in Macarthur**

April 2008 News Sheet

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April's Coffee meeting at Macarthur Square was well attended with much discussion and rising of issues that parents are facing. People continue to get connected with others and it is good to see people enjoying the morning. School remains a major issue with the long first term this year causing problems with kids. Again, plenty of idea sharing and borrowing of a few books from our Resource Library.

Unfortunately, on **Thursday night** we had a bit of a communication breakdown. With no one showing up I left at around 7.20 pm (had a very bad cold) but two families turned up at 7.30 pm thinking that this was the starting time. I did call them up the next day and found they had a good chat in the car park – this often happens after meetings anyway.

Whilst numbers remain very low on Thursday night we will persist for a few more months as we are always attracting a new family each month.

May Meetings

- **Second Wednesday's of the month** 14th May 10 am at The Coffee Club Café at Macarthur Square, next to Border Books, downs stairs and outside where all the new coffee shops etc are.

Pauline Hunter-Knight from Aspect Australia will be joining us to discuss their "Someone to turn to" program that supports families through matching them up with other families.

Aspect has received additional funding through DADHC to expand this program along with funding for Peer Support to young people on the Spectrum. This will include social skill training and Macarthur is on of the areas they are aware it should be provided – just a bit of advocating by us!!

- **Second Thursday of the month** 8th May 7pm at the Harrington Park Community Centre Fairwater Dr next to the shopping centre. We do need a few more people attending to make our meeting viable.

**And yes – the second Thursday comes before the second Wednesday.
Just the beauty of numbers and our calendar.**

Remember the Autism Spectrum Expo

Autism Awareness Expo is on Saturday 10th May. It is being held at the Seymour Centre opposite Sydney University from 9 am to 5 pm with a wide array of speakers and exhibitors on hand to speak to and pick up ideas and information.

A very worthwhile event to visit at no cost to enter - a gold coin donation would be appreciated on the day.

Check their web site on www.autismawareness.com.au for more details

The Future of the Families in Partnership Co-operative

No new news on funding of the Co-operative that facilitates the Support Group. We had a good story in the local press with one of our support group members telling her story and how “the support group is my godsend” - thanks for that.

The Co-operative is meeting with senior staff from DADHC in early May to press our need for funding and how the Co-operative can support families and their member who has a disability.

If funding is not obtained the Co-operative’s Board of Management will be working with its members to determine how it can continue and how groups like the Aspergers Support Group can continue to be facilitated.

Information of families who have teenagers

From: Christine Ayo - christineayo@optusnet.com.au **Sent:** Tuesday, 4 March 2008

It was nice talking to you a few minutes ago. As promised I am attaching a calendar of the outings being organised by the ASteen families this year. We try to have outings every two weeks and parents/teens take it in turn to host the outings.

I am the contact person for the club 0413 781 626 or my email address above. The members of the club communicate via email on a yahoo group link. People interested in joining the club can contact me and I can then give them further information.

The club is open to teens 13 years and over with Aspergers Syndrome only. We have found it is not beneficial to have younger kids because once they come along and find they are ignored because most of the teens are a lot older; they get put off and don't turn up again. We even have young adults to age 24 or so still in the group as they enjoy it so much.

The Inner West Support Group which has its meetings at Burwood RSL on the first Tuesday of each month comes under the umbrella of the Richmond group and is a separate body to the ASteen Club. I just happen to be involved in both groups. The ASteen club stemmed from parents who attend the Inner West Support group meetings.

On the Web

www.yourlittleprofessor.com/friendship some good information for people with aspergers and parents

www.aspergersquare8.blogspot.com a lot of interesting information and views from a grown up aspie

www.youtube.com an array of videos from people who are on the autism spectrum and professionals working in the field. A great way for people to express their viewpoint and for others to better understand aspergers.

Aggression and Violent Behaviour

Story off the web

Aggressive behaviour in the child with Asperger's Syndrome occurs for a reason, just as it would with any other child. Inappropriate behaviour, whether mild or severe, occurs in order to; avoid something, get something, because of pain, or to fulfil a sensory need.

The first step in reducing or eliminating this behaviour is to determine the need that it fulfils.

The second step is to teach them replacement behaviour, i.e. communicate what they want or don't want. It may even involve using some of their obsessive or self-stimulating behaviours as a replacement. This is because it would be far less intrusive to others than aggressive behaviours, but still serve the same purpose.

This process takes time and initially, depending on the behaviour, you may not have time. If the behaviour is severe, then you need to remove the child from whatever situation they are in at the time.

Simply insisting that they stop the behaviour and participate in whatever is occurring will not benefit the child or you, unless you remove them from the situation first. Maintaining their routine will go along way towards reducing the need for inappropriate or aggressive behaviour in the first place.

This is just one of the many tricks, tips and techniques that you can use to cope with your Asperger's child's behaviours that feature in my new book "The Parenting Asperger's Resource Guide". Which you can learn more about by visiting <http://www.ParentingAspergers.com>

Training on the Autism Spectrum Disorder and Challenging behaviour

I am attending training provided by Aspect Australia for local child care workers and community services in Macarthur that focuses on how to providing Positive Behaviour Support for children on the spectrum. Over 50 people are attending the two half day workshops and it was encouraging to see people really interested in up-skilling themselves in the area of autism.

Some of the key points from the first day were:

- **Behaviour = communication.** It's a sign that they are unable to properly communicate their needs and feelings appropriately
- **How we react** to the behaviour is very important. Do we believe the child won't do or believe the child can't do – will result in different response to a situation
- Central coherence is the ability to focus on details as well as the whole. ASD people have weak central coherence and get caught up on details – may increase the likelihood of a challenging behaviour
- **Theory of Mind** is understanding that others have their own thoughts, feelings and experiences that are different to our own and is normally learnt between 2 and 5 years. It allows you to make a link between your behaviour and the effect it will have on others. People with ASD have difficulties in this area
- **Executive Function** is the ability to go about problem solving to reach a future goal, including the abilities to plan, organise, think of options, be flexible, self regulate. Again people with ASD have difficulties with these important abilities.
- **The function of challenging behaviour** is to get something, get away from something, gain attention, or sensory. Knowing the purpose of a behaviour can assist people understanding what is happening and plan for intervention
- **A proactive approach** to intervention uses less energy and time than a reactive approach

More in the next news letter about creating an ASD friendly environment.

Asperger Syndrome can improve concentration

What happens when children with autism grow up? It may sound paradoxical, but some with the mildest form, Asperger Syndrome, may turn out to be stars.

People with Asperger's often have extreme difficulty interacting socially, preferring to focus on narrow fields of interest. But often they're able to pursue those interests with great intensity. Geniuses throughout history, including Albert Einstein, Andy Warhol and Emily Dickinson, have all been thought to have had Asperger's. And now Nobel Laureate Vernon Smith has decided to speak openly about what he calls the deficiencies and the selective advantages of Asperger's.

"I can switch out and go into a concentrated mode and the world is completely shut out," he said in a recent interview. "If I'm writing something, nothing else exists."

Smith received the Nobel Prize in 2002 for inventing the field of experimental economics, which uses laboratory methods to test economic theories. Smith says his capacity for deep concentration contributed to his ability to win the Nobel Prize.

“Perhaps even more importantly, I don't have any trouble thinking outside the box,” he said. “I don't feel any social pressure to do things the way other people are doing them, professionally. And so I have been more open to different ways of looking at a lot of the problems in economics. We don't have to think alike to be communal and to live in a productive and satisfying world”

Source CBS America 2007

Association of Children with Disabilities NSW book launch

“Through the Maize” and “Helping you and your Family”

I attended the launch of these two books by the Association at the NSW State Library that aim to help families understand the wide range of services that are available to support them.

Funded through DADHC they were launch by the Minister for Disabilities Kristina Keneally – gave me a chance to tell her about our support group and the Co-operative.

Both book s will be available through our Resource Library and the Association

Until next time Bob Lester

4648 1593 or 0400 481 520 or email coordinator@fip.org.au Check out www.fip.org.au