

Aspergers Syndrome Support Group for Families in Macarthur

June 2007 News Sheet

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June Meetings

Wednesday's coffee meeting saw a fresh winter's morning with plenty of sunshine in people's eyes – depending where you sat. After discussing who was going to win the football that night (yes Queensland won, congratulations Kathy) and what people had been up to we got down to some serious discussions. As all families who have come along to the support group meetings people are willing to share their stories, what has worked for them?

A new mother told us about her life with two children on the Autism Spectrum. How she uses a **Gratitude Journal** to write in at the end of each day – what have I learnt today, what was positive about today? It has helped her cope and grow as a person. Others thought this was a great idea that they could start up.

A father who himself has an Aspergers Syndrome profile told his story of starting as an apprentice along with 270 others and how this enabled him to cope by not standing out. When he worked in a smaller organisation it was more difficult and shows that with the right environment all people can undertake work of their choosing.

We also had a long discussion on how parents can relate to teenager boys – can anyone relate to a teenager boy? We worked through a number of strategies parents can use, with the book *The Explosive Child* used as a resource for ideas. It is important that parents do not expect too much of teenagers as they try to cope with school, changes in their body shape, different peer pressures and good old hormones.

Thanks to Pete and staff at Pete's café for having us over the past months. He is re opening his establishment as Wicked Bite Restaurant for Lunch and Dinner with a whole new menu on offer. We wish him and his wife well in their new venture

On **Thursday night**, we again welcomed a new couple to the support group even though I did not expect anyone to come along due to the inclement weather. It was an opportunity to hear of their experiences and viewpoints and reflect on the different stages people who have aspergers go through. Children and young people who have aspergers, just like all kids, have a way of coping with the world in which they live. We need to also have coping mechanisms and draw upon the assistance of people around us to cope.

Being my usual self, I could not help providing people with few information sheets to take home and read. The included a summary of the initial two chapters of Tony Attwood's new book that we have in the Resource Library; Nelly Frances explanation of why we need to have a lot of empathy for our family member who has aspergers and Sue Larkey's newsletter item on making choices and telling others your child has been diagnosed with aspergers.

Meetings for July

- **Second Wednesday** 11th July 10am at **The Coffee Club at Macarthur Square** next to Border Books, where all the new coffee shops etc are. Free parking is available on site near David Jones. This is a good location as it offers plenty of space where we can sit outside or inside. **School Holidays but bring the kids along**
- **Second Thursday** 12th July 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.

Co-operative Web Site

www.fip.org.au The Co-operative's web site that is now up and running. The site aims at giving the Co-operative a presence on the internet to increase families and the general community's awareness of what the Co-operative is and does. It provides a range of information on many issues facing people who have a disability and their families.

A special page is dedicated to the Aspergers Syndrome Support Group – have a look at it and tell me what you think. The information is not intended to be all encompassing but a starting point for parents and family members.

Not on the Internet? You can access our site at your local library and it could be a good one for all students at your local school to use, to increase their awareness of disabilities and aspergers specifically. While you are at the library, why not ask them about any programs they have going where you can learn how to use the internet and how to get your own email address for free?

NOTE I also have a new email address coordinator@fip.net.au my old one will still work, for the next few months anyway

Tony Attwood Presentation at Richmond

For two days Tony Attwood, Australia's leading expert on Aspergers Syndrome spoke to nearly 600 people on a wide range of issues facing children and adults who have aspergers. Tony is always very informative and always very entertaining having grown up with a sister who was diagnosed with Aspergers and having a great affinity to "Aspies and their families".

Whilst families in Partnership sponsored a number of families to attend, I know a few more who took the opportunity to hear Tony speak and increase their understanding of aspergers and therefore their own child.

Just a few comments Tony made on the day I attended.

"At least 75% of children with Aspergers syndrome also have a profile indicative of Attention Deficit Disorder"

“Aspies need an Executive Secretary in their lives – someone to organise them. Usually their mum and later their partner”

“Normally people coming into a large room full of people see the faces of people. Look for someone familiar to them and sit with the person. An aspie would come in and see the computer, the camera, and the tables of books – but would not notice the people. Kids see a room full of toys to play with not a friend to play with”

“Many like mathematic – it’s consistent and orderly. 8+8 always equals 16 and is not 12 if they are feeling poor or 20 if everything is going great like in an English essay. They might know the answer but often cannot explain the concept of how they arrived at it”

“Special Interests – a topic to which the individual devotes inordinate amounts of time, amassing information and facts, pursued with great intensity often to the exclusion of other activities. 90% of children and adults have this characteristic that is remarkably stable over time. All interest have a used by date and replace immediately by something else. What and when is unpredictable and they are often cannot bear to throw out their all collection”

Tony Attwood’s presentation was filmed and will be available for viewing in the near future. I will be looking to get a copy and could show it at one of our evening meetings!!! Aldo one of the parents who attended the Thursday presentation has typed up the notes she received and subject to copyright approval, I will also make them available to parents.

New Library Resources

Once again I could not help myself at the Book in Hand stand at the Tony Attwood Presentation. Along with many parents, teachers and community workers browsed through the extensive range of books available on autism and aspergers. These are the three books I purchased that are now available for loan

Asperger Syndrome in Adolescence – Living with the up, the Downs and Things in between. Edited by Liane Holliday Willey with a forward by Luke Jackson, a teenager who has aspergers. The book aims to make the transition from child to adult as smooth as possible and is an essential survival guide to adolescence – or so the back cover says!

Your Like is Not a label – a guide to fully living with autism and aspergers syndrome for parents, professionals and you, written by Jerry Newport who was diagnosed at the age of 47. Tony Attwood used examples from Jerry’s life in his presentation

The Everything Parent’s Guide to Children with Asperger’s Syndrome – help hope and guidance, by William Stillman. An easy to read book covering many aspects of a person’s life with aspergers.

Book in Hand can be contacted on 1800 505 221 or at www.bookinhand.com.au

Get Active Macarthur

20th September 2007 10 am to 2 pm Campbelltown Sports Stadium

An inclusive event organised by Macarthur Disability Services to encourage people to get active, lead healthy lifestyles, participate and become more aware

Kids are encouraged to get their school involved by registering their interest and request promotional material and information sheets. Contact Steve Wisbey at MDS on 4621 8400 or Stephen@mdservices.com.au

Kites for Kids Family Picnic

25th August 2007 at 11am to 2pm in Koshigaya Park Campbelltown

This annual event is on again this year with an attempt to have 100 kites flying over Campbelltown to show “the Sky’s the Limit” for kids who have a disability.

Organised by the Macarthur Early Childhood Intervention services it’s a fun day out for all the family with

- Free kites and decorating
- Face painting, balloons and windmills
- Entertainment and activities
- Show Bags

Parking available opposite the Campbelltown Catholic Club – it is an opportunity to meet other families in an enjoyable atmosphere and see who can teach who how to fly a kite.

Social Skills Programs

Some information about programs I have come across on the web or from handouts at recent Expos/Presentations.

www.kidslink.com.au - a service to help build social skills and positive connections for children and young people - available in small group settings and for specific age groupings. Site has more information on the programs on offer (only held at Putney near Gladesville) and currently two good newsletters to read.
Contact Leonie Reisberg on 0414 452 177

www.learninglinks.org.au – run a social skills program suitable for children aged 10 to 12 years who are having difficulty making and keeping friends - Runs for 9 weeks. I think they could be interested in running a group out in our area if enough parents contact them and show an interest!!

Call them on 9534 1710 for more details. Learning Links head off is at Peakhurst where they conduct other programs for children and parents.

www.skillsforkids.com.au – supporting children on the Autism Spectrum Disorder aged preschool to year 12. A large paediatric occupational therapy and speech pathology private practice, located at Blaxland in the Lower Blue Mountains. Run a number of Playground Skills school holiday Camps
Telephone for more information on 4739 0267

Until next time

Bob Lester

Contact 4648 1593 or 0400 481 520

or email coordinator@fip.org.au