

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

November 2008 News Sheet

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Good News Bad News

Good news is that the support group continues to grow in number with families contacting me regarding information, support with issues they are facing and how they can get involved with the meetings. Two new people attended our Wednesday meeting in November with one even coming along again on the Thursday night.

Information I send out is picked up by other ASD support groups located in Fairfield and Richmond and the new group that has restarted by Park House in Carramar – welcome back Christy. Our group is also linked with ASPIE that is for partners of adults with aspergers, the A4 Autism group in the ACT and with Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect).

All these groups share information and contacts with each other and are part of a range of support groups right across NSW for families who have children and adults on the autism spectrum, with Aspect playing a networking role. So no matter where you may move to there should always be a support group to assist you, or someone who would be help you start up a group.

The Bad News – I have accepted a position with Wollondilly Shire Council as their Community Development Officer and will be leaving with the Co-operative from the 28th November. It is with much regret that I do this as I have really enjoyed working with families over the past five and a half years and with the Support Group for the last two years.

I have met many wonderful people through the support group and wish to thank everyone who has contributed in some way to the success of the group – attending and being involved at meetings, responding to issues I have raised, been involved in student surveys, suggested ideas and resources for other families. And just listening to my rants and raves with a smile and a friendly ear.

Thank you all and I wish you and your family all the best for the future. Always remember that children, teenagers and adults who have aspergers are a child, a teenager or an adult first and foremost. Love them for who they are and all the positives and diversity they bring to our lives.

More Good News is that the management of the Co-operative will be seeking to appoint anew Coordinator for the organisation until a least June next year when the current funding provided the State Government is set to run out. The Support Group will continue and with your involvement can continue on past this point. I encourage you all to maintain your involvement with the Support Group and see how you can contribute to its continuation.

November Meetings

I encourage families to come along to the last meetings for 2008– we all need you there to share your experiences, ideas and support. The next ones will not be until February 2009!!!

- **Second Wednesday 10th December** 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. An opportunity to have chat over a cuppa of your choice and celebrate 2008
- **Second Thursday 11th December** 7pm at the Harrington Park Community Centre Fairwater Dr next to the shopping centre. Bring something along to eat and share with others as we celebrate 2008 and the start of the holiday season.

Helping Children with Autism

The initiatives contained within this Commonwealth Government program are beginning to happen and all families need to be aware of what they contain and how they could benefit from them. Yes it does focus on children under 6 years but children up to 12 years and their parents can access new provisions under Medicare and attend workshops being held over the next four years.

A two day workshop and information session is being held in Ingleburn in February 2008 and you will need to register to be able to attend. They have a website you can visit for more information www.autismtraining.org.au or ring 1300 881 971. Materials from the workshops will be provided online to support people unable to attend in person.

Autism Spectrum Australia have been appointed the Autism Advisors for NSW and are the first point of contact for families wishing to access **the early intervention packages** for children under 6 years. They can be contacted on 8977 8399 or on autismadvisor@autismspectrum.org.au for more information and eligibility criteria.

Remember – even if you can not access these initiatives you may know someone else who may and can spread the information about them around your school or community. Be an advocate for others!!

Research

At the November meetings I handed out information that I found on the internet on the growing amount of research being undertaken to better understand autism and how different learning and coping strategies can be implemented.

The **MIND Institute** researches found that children with autism spend less time looking at the faces of people who are modelling new skills. The Typically developing children may be looking at the demonstrators face to check for information on what to do or how to respond appropriately, information that the children with autism are less inclined to seek. Children with autism have difficulty learning from others.

Imitation plays an important role in how children learn as well as how people interact socially a trait that is often a deficit in children on the autism spectrum.

Researches also found that successful performance of a task by children with autism increases with the amount of time they study it
Source www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases

Other research articles found on www.medicalnewstoday.com dealt with the “Unusual use of toys in infancy a clue to later autism” and “People with autism make more rational decisions”

Thanks for A4 newsletter for alerting me to this research.

Library Books

With the end of 2008 at hand it would also be great to have all our library resources at hand so that we can start 2009 with a full shelf of books, DVD's and videos. While our library is small it is well used but unless resources are returned other parents cannot gain the benefit from them.

At meetings families are always suggesting books that they have found of interest and a few will be purchased in the new-year when extra funds become available. I noticed that Angus and Robinson located at Sinclair Pharmacy in Camden has a new range of books available and in speaking with the lady there they will always get in any book you are look for.

The same goes for Border Books and all three local council libraries (no cost here).

The Gray Centre

The Gray Centre Social Understanding Network in the USA is a wonderful resource for parents looking for ideas to assist their child in learning. It was established by the lady who first used visual aids to assist children and has a weekly newsletter that you can get online for free.

Two items I have received this month included how to handle the issue of The Tooth Fairy myth or tell your child that Santa is really their dad. This was discussed at our Wednesday November meeting with much laughter how we parents do carry on with the traditions of Christmas with lights, food for the reindeer and how we checked that we had the same number of presents when we were a child.

The other was some more research on how genes may be prevented from turning the brains ability to form new connections in response to experience eg have to tell my child a hundred times to do a simple task, and lessons learned from one experience often do not generalise to the next.

Well worth having a look at their site www.thegraycentre.org and subscribe to their email news – no cost involved.

Special Examination Provisions

If your son or daughter is sitting for an exam at school, you can apply for special provisions to ensure that they are not disadvantaged eg the format or timing of the exam. Individual schools should be able to handle most requests for yearly exams with advice from the Board of Studies.

For the School Certificate and Higher School Certificate the Board of Studies can explain the application process for special provisions, what evidence is required and how applications are deliberated. Some of the provisions include extra time, large print, coloured paper, reader and or writer.

It is important that you are aware of the ability for students to have assistance and work with your school in determining the best or most appropriate assistance that will help them through their exams. See you school principle or school counsellor well before exam time to get things happening and give your child or teenager time to adapt

A good contact to help you is the Learning Difficulties Coalition on 9806 9960 or info@ldc.org.au

From Sue Larkey

Research has indicated that many people on the autism spectrum have improved concentration with a fidget toy in their hand. It calms them, reduces stress and reduces distractions, therefore making learning readiness and promoting good behaviour. A good indicator of whether a child needs a fidget toy is “what happens if you remove it?” Will they pick their fingers, chew on their collar or hat string? Will they start to move their legs, body? Will they be easily distracted by other children?

I use the analogy of a child who is vision impaired – we give them glasses to help their vision. Fidget and sensory toys actually have the same outcome as wearing glasses. Increased concentration, more independence, engage in learning for longer, more positive about sitting for long periods.

Source www.suelarkey.com

Bob's Comment

How many parents use a sensory or fidget toy during the day. Who twirls a pen while they are working? Who twist the phone cord about whilst on the phone (with mobiles we seem to walk about!!)?

How many cricketers chew gum whilst they play? How many athletes listen to their I-pod before starting a race?

Count the number of people who poke their tongue out when concentrating and see how we all need sensory stimulation to learn and perform better.

Anxiety and aspergers

Many families find that their child or teenager who has Aspergers suffers from bouts of anxiety or is so anxious that it affects their daily routine. It is a common expression of aspergers to be anxious as they are uncertain of what the future may be, are unable to learn fully from past experiences to generalise the future and feel everything can be life threatening. A bit of the being “Mr Perfect” part of aspergers.

Going to school each day can be a very anxious experience especially when the person is uncertain about what will be happening and how people will react. Adults experience the same thing going to work and have told how they need to constantly phone their partner of parent to enable them to walk into their office.

Generalised Anxiety Disorder is characterised by anxiety and worry which is excessive & persistent in nature, and frequently revolves around everyday life circumstances such as job responsibilities, finances, health, family members or minor matters. It is often accompanied by additional symptoms such as restlessness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension, and disturbed sleep. Source www.sadp.com.au

Anxiety is a common disorder for people right throughout the community, not just with aspergers. There are many ways for people to learn how not to be so anxious and how to cope with stressful situations with a number of organisations available to help including:

Sane Australia www.sane.org.au 1800 187 263
Beyond Blue www.beyondblue.org.au 1300 224 636
Anxiety Disorders Support and Information www.mentalhealth.asn.au/ada 1300 794 992
Kids Help Line www.kidshelp.com.au 1800 551 800
Lifeline 13 11 14
Looking for a Psychologist www.psychology.or.au 1800 333 497

University Units

The University of Sydney is currently doing a study on children who worry too much, get angry often or avoid social situations and activities. The Talking and Feeling study is being run by Nicky Abitz and Tamara Kezelman who can also discuss treatment options with you.

Contact either nicky@psych.usyd.edu.au or tamarack@psych.usyd.edu.au or call 9351 3493 or look at their website www.psych.usyd.edu.au/eric

Macquarie University has a Unit that specialises in Anxiety www.psy.mq.edu.au/MUARU/ that contains information and access to resources. They also conduct clinics at their Ryde campus contactable on 8950 8777

Hope you can make a meeting in December or sometime in the new- year. Bye and thanks for the fish

Bob Lester

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

Check out www.fip.org.au for more information on aspergers and other disability related issues.