



The National
Autistic Society

Lancaster & Morecambe Branch

Newsletter

Welcome

Hi all and welcome to February's newsletter.

Many thanks to Julie Richmond for her very interesting article on Women and Girls on the spectrum. Ju is the "Person Centred Approaches" Co-ordinator for Lancashire Piccadilly Support Services and has kindly offered to talk to a small group of our girls/young women on the spectrum so please get in touch if you would like us to arrange this.

We are all getting ready for a very busy and exciting couple of months up ahead!

What Now course

Our branch has secured funding for Maria Lyon to run the What Now course, starting on the 5th March. It's a great introduction to autism for parents/carers of a child with an ASD diagnosis.

It's an 8 week course based at Poulton Children's centre in Morecambe, 10-12pm. Places will be given on a first come first served basis on receipt of a completed application form. If you are interested in attending this course then please get in touch for more details. The deadline for returning the form is Friday 13th February.

World Autism Awareness Week (WAAW)



27th March - 2nd April is World Autism Awareness Week (WAAW) and we are planning some fun activities including a sponsored walk from Morecambe to Lancaster. We hope to get as many schools and business involved as we can. If you have any ideas or are able to help then please get in touch. More details to follow shortly and more information about WAAW can be found on the NAS website <http://www.autism.org.uk/get-involved/raise-money/world-autism-awareness-week.aspx>

Information meetings

Over the next few months we will be trialling new locations for our information meetings.

We will keep our regular meetings at Firbank - with guest speakers. If there is a subject/issue that you would like us to cover then please let us know.

Our last speaker, Josh Durham from the Wyre & Lancaster District Hate Crime Project, had some very useful advice on how to prevent bullying from escalating. I will do a write up for next month's newsletter. He also talks to children in schools and social groups eg scouts so if you would be interested in inviting him along (free service) then I can pass on his details.

On Wednesday 4th March Cat Smith, Labour Parliamentary Candidate for Lancaster and Fleetwood, will be coming for a Q&A session at Firbank so please come along to voice your concerns and ask your questions.

We are hosting some informal drop in sessions at Carnforth Children's centre on 2nd March and 13th April 9.30-11.30. These meetings are smaller and quieter for those who maybe don't feel comfortable in larger groups.

We are planning an informal coffee afternoon in Wray sometime in March. If you would like us to come to your village/area then please get in touch.

Our library is growing all the time and it's not possible to bring everything with us. You can reserve our books on-line and we'll drop them off/pick them up at the above meetings (members only) <https://www.naslandm.co.uk/library.php>

Valentine's disco



Our Valentine's disco will be at the Trimpell club on Saturday 14th February 2-4pm. No need to book but it would be good to get an idea of numbers for our card making competition and cake/biscuit decorations! There will be a voluntary donation of £1 per child at the door and lots of fun activities for the children and their siblings. Hope to see you there !

Accept difference. Not indifference.



The National
Autistic Society

Lancaster & Morecambe Branch

Newsletter

I'm one

iiii'm One

of 2.8 million

people who has someone

with autism in my family.

And I'll be voting.

autism.org.uk/ImOne

General Election Campaign 2015



We are gearing up to our "I'm one" campaign ahead of the general election in May. We will be contacting our MPs to ask how their policies and agendas will be affecting our families and we will be inviting some of them to our coffee mornings. More information on the NAS campaign can be found on their website <http://www.autism.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-for-change/learn-more/our-campaigns/current-campaigns/imone-general-election-campaign-2015.aspx>

MAX cards

Our branch has been given the opportunity to purchase some MAX cards which offer free or discounted entry to various attractions. Sadly there aren't any places to use it in Lancaster and Morecambe but it can be used nationwide and only costs £2.50 for a two year card. If you would like one then please get in touch with us. Details of where the card can be used is on their website <http://www.mymaxcard.co.uk/>

Family fun & information day

Free family fun & information day @ Salt Ayre Sat 7th March organised by Lucy Ellis and her North Lancashire Directions group.

A fantastic day out for families with children who have additional needs. There will be information stalls, seminars and lots of activities for the kids. If you register on line you can avoid any queues on the day.

<http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/family-funinformation-day-for-childrenyoung-people-with-additional-needstickets-14673030429>

Wise Up Workshops

Two "autism friendly" drama clubs will be starting up after the half term holiday. Wise up workshops use Art Forms to promote personal development, confidence and communication skills in young people. The purpose is to help make sense of difficult life experiences or complex psychological issues through the use of creativity.

Weekly sessions cost £4, the taster session is £2.50.

Age group for the first half term is age 6+ upwards. If there is enough interest they may split the group into age categories (ie: 6-10 & 11-16).

The planned start date for Morecambe is Tuesday 24th February and sessions will run every Tuesday 3.30-4.30pm at Morecambe parish Memorial Hall next to the police station.

If any children attend St Mary's/ Poulton Primary school they offer a 'walking taxi' for any pupils attending the club.

There will also be a drama club in Lancaster every Thursday 3.30-4.30pm at Kings Community centre starting the 26th of February.

They say that parents are welcome to stay but it isn't necessary as they are fully staffed and have qualified practitioners on site.

For more information contact Elspeth Roberts, Workshop Leader wiseupworkshops@hotmail.com 07506 295782 <http://www.wiseupworkshops.com/>

Please note: this is not an NAS activity.

Accept difference. Not indifference.



The National
Autistic Society

Lancaster & Morecambe Branch

Newsletter

Feedback from Aspergers youth group meeting

A big thank you to everyone who attended the recent brainstorming session at Morecambe library. Six families attended and another three have expressed interest so we definitely have enough teenagers to form a group. The childrens' ages ranged from 13 - 17 and were all boys! I know we have some girls out there and it would be great if they could join in.

The children were great at telling us what they did/didn't want from the club which is exactly what we needed to hear. We discussed lots of ideas for structured activities and life skills but the feedback we got was the children wanted it to be more informal, at least for the first few sessions, so they can get to know each other and the psychology students. The YPS room has pool and a table tennis table, some computers and we can bring games and lego and maybe try some arts & craft activities.

Other suggestions were for them to cook a meal (trying different foods from around the world) as there is a fully equipped kitchen. Dr Who was also very popular so we need to think of some planned activities around this theme.

It's looking promising for us to book the YPS room on a regular basis (Wednesdays 6-8pm) and we hope to get started in early March. I'll be in touch as soon as this is confirmed.

Due to NAS Insurance policies, parents will have to stay on site but there is a separate room where you can have tea/coffee and chat to the other parents and we can use it to have our own social group!

If your child would like to attend this group then please get in touch and we can chat about planned activities. You will need to book in for each session so we know who's coming and it's open to teenagers aged 13-19 who have a diagnosis of Aspergers/high functioning autism.

NAS Resource Centre, Preston

The new (NAS) Autism resource centre in Preston is opening up in the next few weeks and they are offering appointments for people to go down and talk to the staff and have a look around.

The centre aims to offer a wide range of educational support for young people (16+) and adults with Autism and can offer workshops to enable new and existing skills to develop, in addition to providing transitional support into adulthood.

For more information give them a call on 01772 558576

EHC plans and tribunals

Last month I promised you more information about Barnados, an independent supporter for Lancashire who can help families during the assessment and planning of their Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan.

The service is free and we're told they also run "aspiration" workshops for children to get them involved with their plan and to think about what their hopes and ambitions are, something which can be difficult for our children.

For more information please contact them on 01772 629470 or IndependentSupporters@barnados.org.uk

If you're not happy with the Local authority's decision and are struggling to get an EHC plan/get an existing plan amended then you may consider going to a SEND tribunal. This sounds very daunting and time consuming but we are fortunate to have a member in our group who has not only (successfully) been through this process for his own son but is a SEN Adviser & Tribunal Representative and has helped hundreds of families during his career. He is happy to chat to parents if they are considering this option. If you get in touch with me then I can pass your details onto him.

IPSEA also have some very useful information about the SEND tribunal process

<http://www.ipsea.org.uk/what-you-need-to-know/send-tribunal>

Accept difference. Not indifference.



The National
Autistic Society

Lancaster & Morecambe Branch

Newsletter

Women and girls with Autistic Spectrum Conditions

Authorised by Ju Richmond

Introduction

Dr Judith Gould, director of the National Autistic Society's Lorna Wing Centre for Autism, believes that "Girls are not being picked up because there is still a stereotyped view of what Autism is, which is based entirely on how boys present with the condition....Professionals are not up to speed in knowing how girls present".

Tony Attwood, author of *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome* said that "Girls slip through the diagnostic net because they are so good at camouflaging or masking their symptoms. Boys tend to externalise their problems, while girls learn that, if they're good, their differences will not be noticed. Boys go into attack mode when frustrated while girls may suffer in silence and become passive-aggressive. Girls learn to appease and apologise. They learn to observe people from a distance and imitate them. It is only if you look closely and ask the right questions you see the terror in their eyes and see that their reactions are a learnt script."

"Many females have had years of developing a wide variety of coping mechanisms and strategies, even enabling some women to "pass as normal" most of the time. Their use of Social Echolalia (copying, mimicking and acting) can make it a challenge for professionals not familiar with the unique female characteristics and traits. Many females can socialize quite well for short periods of time. However, they are emotionally drained and then need solitude to restore and recharge."(Tania Marshall, author of *I am Aspiegirl*.)

"I've spent so long pretending, I've forgotten who I really am" This is a sentiment I've heard from a lot of autistic women. Those who are successful in fitting in (even if they don't ever feel truly accepted) find their real identities – the people they would be if they didn't have to pretend to be someone else all the time – get blurred with the new "fake-normal" person they feel they have to be.

There are also many gender inequalities in the research on autism. These can contribute to biases in assessment tools and diagnostic interviews.

Socialisation

Girls are generally more social than boys. They seem to have a greater understanding of the need for social interaction. This is reflected in girls on the autistic spectrum too. Autistic boys may have no friends whereas autistic girls and women may tend to have one close friend.

As referred to above, girls are more able to follow social actions by delayed imitation. They observe other children and copy them – which masks the symptoms. However, they are often on the edge or the outside of social activities, often feeling left out. Even when they are welcomed they are always feeling like they never quite fit in. Girls have a better imagination and more pretend play activities than boys on the spectrum. In fact, they can

have rich fantasy worlds in which to escape.

When joining in social play girls tend to be guided or led by their peers rather than being the ones who initiate play, or they may feel panicked if things are not done the way they expect or they may dominate others. They often end up playing with younger or older children or preferring the company of boys. Their play has much less reciprocity than that of other girls. Girls are said to be more likely to be 'mothered' by other girls, especially at primary school, although once they get to secondary school problems may begin and they may be bullied or withdraw from others and seek comfort in books or pursuing our special interests. They often become good in one to one interactions, but become uncomfortable or anxious in group situations. Some of them manage to socialise quite well but find it difficult to sustain over long periods of time. They may suffer from social exhaustion afterwards.

As girls, we learn to hide in plain sight. We hover at the fringes of social groups, giving the impression that we have friends. We sit quietly through years of school, creating the illusion of shyness. We let older girls take us under their wings, mothering and mentoring us in the social skills that they sense we're lacking. We learn that there are rules and we set out to master them as best we can. We learn that we have roles to play and we struggle to fill them, often at the cost of our self-esteem. (Sue)

Communication

Autistic girls generally have better language abilities to boys of a similar age so difficulties with communication are often not noticed. But autistic girls often do not do social chit-chat or make meaningless comments to facilitate social communication. They tend to prefer conversations that have a purpose to them.

They may have difficulties communicating thoughts and feelings, in words, to others, especially if anxious, stressed or upset. Sensory issues often cause exhaustion and sensory overload that interrupts good communication. Many find they can type or write out thoughts much more easily. They may dislike asking others for help, be unable to ask or not know how to ask for help. Girls with autism may misunderstand what people say to them due to the tendency to take things literally. This is something that woman have often learnt to overcome.

Special interests

Some of the female special interests include: psychology, celebrities, self-help, animals, fantasy, writing, art, acting and music. It is not the interests themselves which set them apart from their peers, as is the case with boys.

They may have more than one interest or switch to another interest over time.

"Because the diagnostic feature is often labelled as unnatural interest in a particular object, females that like horses (for example) are not picked up as

Accept difference. Not indifference.

Newsletter

displaying unusual behaviour. I mean my special interests, are bones, forensics, Ancient Egypt, Archaeology and currently JAM and KNITTING!"
(Rachel)

If an adult walked by and glanced in my room, they would have seen a little girl playing with her dolls. Only if they'd watched carefully would they have noticed that I did the exact same thing every time. Classic autistic behaviour camouflaged in a girly disguise. If I'd been a boy with a love of sorting batteries or radio parts, my autistic traits may have been more noticeable.
(Claire)

Sexuality and Bodies

There are many issues that are specific to autistic girls/women and often not really understood by professionals. Puberty, pregnancy, being a mother, menopause, female medical conditions, dating and relationship issues. And those who are lesbian or asexual. Issues around how women are judged on their fashion, hair, makeup, voice tone. All of these bring specific challenges to be navigated.

Myths

MYTH 1: *You can't have an ASC because you have empathy and compassion?*

There are different types of empathy. Tania Marshall states, "Many of the adult females I have worked with can be found in the caring or teaching professions. I have worked with women on the spectrum who are nurses, special education teachers, professors, psychologists, social workers, doctors and child care workers, amongst others."

MYTH 2: *You can't have an ASC because you use eye contact?*

Females tend to adopt strategies as they grow up which help them to develop eye contact, or to appear as if they do. This does not mean it is natural to them or that they feel comfortable with it.

MYTH 3: *You can't have an ASC because you have a career?*

Finding a job and succeeding in the workplace can be extremely problematic for ASC women for many reasons not of their own making. They have much to offer and when they are lucky enough to find the right job and the right workplace they can excel in their careers.

MYTH 4: *You can't be a good partner/mother if you are on the autism spectrum?*

Like all the other myths, this has little basis in fact. Autistic partners and mothers have their own strengths and challenges, like all other parents. Honesty, dedication, a keen interest in fairness and justice, a great information-seeker, a personal knowledge of being children with autism. These are all immensely useful assets.

Links to further information

Screening tools for pre-school girls and women -
<http://taniamarshall.com/female-aspergers-screeners.html>

Non official checklist
<https://aspergersgirls.wordpress.com/2012/03/31/day-62-females-with-aspergers-syndrome-nonofficial-checklist/>

Books


Aspergirl – Rudy Simone
Aspiengirl – Tania Marshall
Aspergers and girls – Tony Atwood
Pretending to be normal – Liane Holliday Wiley
Women from another planet – Jean Kearns Miller
Asperkids – Jennifer O'Tool
Shy, Nerdy and socially inappropriate – Cynthia Kim

Websites

Autism Women Matter
Autism Womens Association
Life on the spectrum
The Girl With The Curly Hair

Blogs

Musings of an aspie
Everyday aspergers
RS Salas



Accept difference. Not indifference.

Contacts



Lancaster & Morecambe Branch Contacts

Branch Officer

Gillian Mann
landm@nas.org.uk
07500 881 831

Librarian, Education

Tracy Duffy
tracy.d@naslandm.co.uk

Campaigns, Education

Kizzy Felstead
kizzy.f@naslandm.co.uk

Fundraising

Debbie Callender
debbie.c@naslandm.co.uk

Fundraising

Debs Brookes
debs.b@naslandm.co.uk



NASLandM



@NASLandM

www.naslandm.co.uk

Other useful contacts

Unless stated, organisations not endorsed by the NAS Lancaster & Morecambe Branch or the NAS

General

NAS Helpline:

Tel: 0808 800 4104 (10am – 4pm), or email autismhelpline@nas.org.uk (replies within 14 working days)
www.autism.org.uk

Wyre and Lancaster District Hate Crime project

Funded by the Big Lottery, Lancaster Local Strategic Partnership and Wyre Council and the only project of its kind in the North West, where the hate crime officer works in partnership with the police but is independent of them.
<http://www.wldhatecrime.net/>

Local Offer

<http://tinyurl.com/mv2e47m>

Education

Barnados Independent supporters

E mail IndependentSupporters@barnados.org.uk 01772 629470

IPSEA - Independent Parental Special Education Advice

www.ipsea.org.uk

Support

NAS Parent-to-Parent line 0808 800 4106

UK-wide confidential service providing emotional support to parents and carers of children or adults with autism

NAS community discussion forum

for people to talk about autism and share their thoughts, questions and experiences. To register go to their home page
<http://community.autism.org.uk/discussions>

NAS E-Befriending service

open to anyone age 12+ Care is taken to ensure people are appropriately matched based on age and interest. For more information and an application pack please contact E-befriending@nas.org.uk or call 02920 629314 Mobile: 07920 295911

Local Information

North Lancs Directions Group

www.northlancsdirectionsgroup.com

FIND database - including on line newsletters

<http://tinyurl.com/kcfnmuc>

Accept difference. Not indifference.



The National
Autistic Society

Lancaster & Morecambe Branch

Diary Dates

Sat 14th Feb, 14:00-16:00

Valentines disco

for children with autism & their families

£1 donation per child at the door. Lots of fun activities including cake decorating and sensory tent

Sun 22nd Feb, 10:00

Autism Friendly Screening "Penguins of Madagascar"

Vue cinema, Lancaster

£1.75. Any additional need, no proof needed

Sun 22nd Feb, 14:00-16:00

Mencap Karaoke

Mencap, Charles St, Morecambe

Karaoke at mencap will be on every 3rd Sunday of the month (February exception), everyone of all ages is welcome to go along. The cost of this event will be £2 and this includes a drink.

Mon 2nd Mar, 09:30-11:30

NAS drop in and chat

Carnforth Children's Centre

An informal drop in session for anyone with an interest in autism

Tue 3rd Mar, 10:30-12:00

Lancaster Parent Carer Forum

Poulton Children's Centre

Rachel Shatford 01772 532509. (Creche available for under 5s, please book with Lucy Ellis 07873 818153 or Sheila Dowbiggin 833644)

Wed 4th Mar, 10:00-12:00

NAS information morning

Firbank children's centre

Q&A session with Cat Smith, Labour

Parliamentary Candidate for Lancaster and Fleetwood

Sat 7th Mar, 11:00-15:00

SEN Family fun and Information day

Salt Ayre sports centre, Lancaster

For children & young people with additional needs and their families/carers. Lots of information, stall holders and free activities/entry. To register/for more info go to www.nldg2015.eventbrite.co.uk

More information on all groups available

at <http://naslandm.co.uk/regular-events.php>

Monday, 13:00 - 15:00, Bright Sparks, Poulton CC

Contact: Ruth Threlfall – 01524 833644

Monday, 17:00 - 19:00, Kids United, Mencap, Charles St, Morecambe

Contact: Leona 07432274195

Tuesday, 13:00 - 15:00, AOK, Lune Park CC

Contact: Trisha/Claire 01524 382818. Parent supporter is Lucy Ellis

Tuesday, 15:45 - 17:15, Disability Multi Sports club, Salt Ayre sports centre

Contact: Salt ayre on 01524 847540

Wednesday, 10:30 - 12:00, Unique Kidz Coffee and Cake, West End Impact

Contact: Jane Halpin 07544570384

Saturday, 09:00 - 12:00, Bright Sparks, Heysham CC

Contact: Victoria Hutton on 01524 409569

booking essential

Saturday, 10:30 - 11:30, Multi-ball skills sessions, Globe Arena astro turf pitch

Contact: Morecambe community sports at the Globe on 01524 411797

booking essential

Saturday, 13:00 - 16:00, Saturday Superstars, Heysham CC

Contact: Victoria Hutton on 01524 409569

booking essential

Saturday, 15:30 - 16:30, Disabilities Trampolining, University of Cumbria

Contact: Sports complex on 01524 526526

booking essential

Sunday, 14:00 - 16:00, Sunday disability sports, Lancaster University

Contact: frances.jones2@barnados.org.uk 01772 629470/0792 0153460

booking essential

If you have a group or event that may be of interest to our members, please email landm@nas.org.uk

Accept difference. Not indifference.