

CALDERDALE ASPERGERS GROUP NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2015 EDITION (7TH)

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INTRODUCTION

Hello and welcome to the December 2015 edition of the Calderdale Asperger's Group Newsletter. This edition will be the final one of 2015 and both myself and Dawn would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

This year has been a very busy year for the group seeing the departure of Matt and the arrival and departure of Shazia too. I'm sure you will join me in wishing them both the very best in the future.

In September we had our first themed group meeting, a special writing event. Feedback has been very positive and we would like to have more events like this in 2016. It doesn't matter what your interest is just get in touch with Dawn and we will do our best to find a slot for it in 2016. We want to involve you the group members as much as we can and this is a way of doing it.

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WHAT IS ASPERGERS SYNDROME?

Asperger syndrome is a form of [autism](#), which is a lifelong disability that affects how a person makes sense of the world, processes information and relates to other people. Autism is often described as a 'spectrum disorder' because the condition affects people in many different ways and to varying degrees. (For more information about autism, please read our leaflet [What is autism?](#))

Asperger syndrome is mostly a 'hidden disability'. This means that you can't tell that someone has the condition from their outward appearance. People with the condition have difficulties in three main areas. They are:

- social communication
- social interaction
- social imagination.

They are often referred to as 'the triad of impairments'.

The characteristics of Asperger syndrome vary from one person to another but are generally divided into three main groups.

Difficulty with social communication

If you have Asperger syndrome, understanding conversation is like trying to understand a foreign language.

People with Asperger syndrome sometimes find it difficult to express themselves emotionally and [socially](#). For example, they may:

- have difficulty understanding gestures, facial expressions or tone of voice
- have difficulty knowing when to start or end a conversation and choosing topics to talk about
- use [complex words and phrases](#) but may not fully understand what they mean
- be very literal in what they say and can have difficulty understanding jokes, metaphor and sarcasm. For example, a person with Asperger syndrome may be confused by the phrase 'That's cool' when people use it to say something is good.

In order to help a person with Asperger syndrome understand you, keep your sentences short - [be clear and concise](#).

Difficulty with social interaction

I have difficulty picking up social cues, and difficulty in knowing what to do when I get things wrong.

Many people with Asperger syndrome want to be sociable but have difficulty with initiating and sustaining social relationships, which can make them very anxious. People with the condition may:

- struggle to make and maintain friendships
- not understand the unwritten 'social rules' that most of us pick up without thinking. For example, they may stand too close to another person, or start an inappropriate topic of conversation
- find other people unpredictable and confusing
- become withdrawn and seem uninterested in other people, appearing almost aloof
- behave in what may seem an inappropriate manner.

Difficulty with social imagination

We have trouble working out what other people know. We have more difficulty guessing what other people are thinking.

People with Asperger syndrome can be imaginative in the conventional use of the word. For example, many are accomplished writers, artists and musicians. But people with Asperger syndrome can have difficulty with social imagination. This can include:

- imagining alternative outcomes to situations and finding it hard to predict what will happen next
- understanding or interpreting other people's thoughts, feelings or actions. The subtle messages that are put across by facial expression and body language are often missed
- having a [limited range of imaginative activities](#), which can be pursued rigidly and repetitively, eg lining up toys or collecting and organising things related to his or her interest.

Some children with Asperger syndrome may find it difficult to play 'let's pretend' games or prefer subjects rooted in logic and systems, such as mathematics.

Who is affected by Asperger syndrome?

There are [over half a million people in the UK with an autism spectrum disorder](#) - that's around 1 in 100. People with Asperger syndrome come from all nationalities, cultures, social backgrounds and religions. However, the condition appears to be [more common in males than females](#); the reason for this is unknown.

WHAT'S GOING ON IN CALDERDALE?

Date:

22 December 2015 - 24 December 2015, 29 December 2015 - 31 December 2015, 2 January 2016, 5 January 2016 - 9 January 2016, 12 January 2016 - 16 January 2016

Event:

Exhibition: Halifax Art Society Annual Exhibition
An exhibition of work created by the members of Halifax Art Society.

[Bankfield Museum](#)

Event times:

10am - 4pm

Admission:

Free

Venue:

Bankfield Museum, Boothtown Road, Halifax, HX3 6HG

Club / Society:

[Halifax Art Society](#)

12 January 2016, 19 January 2016, 9 February 2016, 15 March 2016

Date:

19 December 2015

Event:

Santa at Shibden

Join Santa and his helpers in Shibden Park, Halifax as they prepare for Christmas, ride the Santa Express and the Land Train with a visit to Santa in his grotto.

Various times available throughout the day. Prices £3.00 for adults £ 6.00 for Children includes gifts.

Please indicate age and boy/girl when booking. To book visit [Shibden TicketSource](#)➔

Venue:

Shibden Hall, Lister's Road, Halifax, HX3 6XG

Date:

20 December 2015

Event:

Concert: Carols for a Century with The Accord Singers

A festive concert to celebrate 100 years of Christmas; an Accord Singers concert is always a treat.

We'll give you a blend of good music, readings and poetry to make you think (and to make you smile) and some moments for laughter too.

Come along and start your Christmas with us!

Event times:

7.30pm

Venue:

St. John the Divine, Rastrick, HD6 1HT

Club / Society:

[The Accord Singers](#)

NAS CALDERDALE BRANCH

The NAS Calderdale Branch provides support, information, training and social activities for families and adults affected by an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). These include informal coffee mornings once a month, speakers and training sessions, family days out and social events for children. The Branch also works with local service providers to advise them on the needs of ASD people

Phone: 07798 617448

Email: calderdale@nas.org.uk

WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING?

If you have any stories and / or photos about what you have been doing over the past few months and would to have it included in the newsletter please get in contact. This could be anything from a trip out somewhere in the community, a work experience or if you have been volunteering somewhere new.

Please contact Dawn Collins at Dawn.Collins@calderdale.gov.uk with your contribution to have it included in future editions of the newsletter.

FACT OR MYTH and GETTING TO KNOW are one section this time because it's – SANTA CLAUS!!

Just for a bit of fun here are twelve reasons why Santa Claus may have Asperger's! Now not everybody on the spectrum will display any or all of these traits but it does make you wonder...

12 REASONS WHY SANTA HAS AUTISM:

1. He lines up & names his reindeer over and over again
2. He wears the same clothes every day
3. He has an extremely limited diet of only milk and cookies
4. He gets stuck in the same routine year after year
5. He avoids social interaction & does all of his work at night when everyone else is sleeping
6. He checks his list over and over and over.....
7. He likes hanging out with people smaller than he is
8. Everything is black or white (naughty or nice) no in-between!
9. He loves squeezing into teeny spaces (chimneys!)
10. He is clueless about the social stigma of creeping into other people's houses
11. He spends an entire year preparing for one night
12. He does things that amaze people & has them wondering how in the heck he did it!

And here are some websites where you can find out more about Santa:

<http://www.claus.com/index.php>

<http://www.santaclausvillage.info/>

<http://www.santaclaus.com/>

UPDATE ON THE CALDERDALE ASPERGER'S GROUPS

There are three peer support groups for adults with Aspergers. You don't need a diagnosis to attend, and we can advise on getting a diagnosis. The groups are informal and free drinks and snacks are provided. We discuss living with Aspergers, coping strategies and related topics.

From 2016 the main group will be held on the second Friday of the month from 12.00 to 1.30 at Halifax Library. About 15 people attend this group each month. We have had a creative writing session recently which Andy organised and his friend Gwen came along and shared some of her poetry.

There is an evening group at Hebden Bridge Town Hall which meets monthly at 7.30-8.30pm, and around 4-6 people attend this group. Having an evening group is useful for people who are working or can't attend during the daytime.

The third group will be on the fourth Tuesday of each month 2.30-3.30pm, also at Halifax Library. This is a smaller group of around 6-8 people.

We also have a Partners Group for partners of adults with Aspergers which meets one evening a month.

For more details on any of the groups, please contact Dawn Collins on 01422 393966 or Dawn.Collins@Calderdale.gov.uk or <http://welcome.calderdaleaspergers.com>

BLOG/WEBSITE ADDRESSES OF MEMBERS OF CAG

Do you have a blog that you would like other members of the group to read? If so contact Dawn. Two of our members already have blogs. They are Alison Schofield and Andy Smith.

Alison's blog is at: <http://www.blog.co.uk/user/alison-the-bendy-zebra/>

And Andy's blog is at: andyqby19.wordpress.com

James Giblin, who attends the Friday Halifax Group has just launched the website for his new photography business: www.northernphotoart.com

If you or anyone you know is looking for a photographer, please have a look or tell them about it.

THE CALDERDALE ASPERGERS GROUP WEBSITE IS LIVE

In case you haven't seen it, here is our new website, designed by our very own Alison Schofield! <http://www.thecalderdaleautismnetwork.co.uk>

Please let Alison have any useful links, research or events for the website at calderdalean@yahoo.co.uk

Your input is valuable to the running of the website.

DO YOU HAVE ANY FEEDBACK ON THE NEWSLETTER?

We would like to know what our readers think about the newsletter, what have you enjoyed reading and why? Are there things that you would like to see included that we may not have already covered in previous editions? Or even something that could be improved or changed in future editions of the newsletter?

If you have any feedback, please share this with Dawn Collins at Dawn.Collins@Calderdale.gov.uk

AUTISM WEBSITES

A list of websites dedicated to autism and people on the spectrum.

The Aspergers Association of Aragon has created an interactive game in Spanish with English subtitles to teach social skills. Very cool indeed!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5F4aoW0ahdc&feature=youtu.be>

Sesame Street's newest character, a little girl called Julia, is on the autism spectrum.



Julia, who "does things a little differently", has been introduced as part of a Sesame Street initiative in the US called 'See Amazing in all Children'. It is aimed at both the autistic community and the wider public. It was launched to improve public understanding of autism and challenge the many misconceptions that still exist around the condition.

Julia won't feature on the TV show but will be included in digital and printed story books, including a range of learning resources on the [Sesame Street website](#).

We at the National Autistic Society think that culture has a crucial role to play in improving public understanding of autism. We believe that Julia's introduction to the Sesame Street world is a significant moment. We hope it will inspire other writers and film-makers to include autistic characters in their work.

Mark Lever, Chief Executive of the National Autistic Society, spoke to [BBC newsbeat](#) and the [Metro](#) earlier today. He said:

What we like most about their approach is how it celebrates difference and shows how a little understanding can change everything. For instance, one scene in the Sesame Street storybook shows Julia flapping. Rather than giving her an unhelpful and judgemental look – as can often happen in reality – Elmo simply explains that this means that Julia is excited. It seems really simple, but things like this can make such a huge difference.

More than 1 in 100 people are on the autism spectrum, but there's still widespread misunderstanding about what it's actually like to be autistic and how challenging everyday life can be. The NAS is prioritising work with TV, theatre, art and culture,

because we know they play a central role in correcting misconceptions and creating a more understanding world. Some of the biggest leaps forward have happened because of stories such as *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and we hope that the character of Julia will have a similar effect.

Autism can have a profound effect on a person and their family, but the right understanding and support from others can transform their lives."

For more information, [visit the Sesame Street website](#).

Mother shouts out Santa who talked about autism with her son

GRANDVILLE, Mich. (WJBK) - A mother's shout out to the Santa at Michigan mall has quickly gone viral on Facebook. Naomi Johnson shared her story of thanks on the RiverTown Crossings' Facebook page.

Naomi writes that her son Landon "said his peace to the old man in red" and then walked away. While his cousins were taking their turn with Santa, though, Landon decided that he still had some things he wanted to say to ole St. Nick.

I had an AMAZING experience w the Santa at the RiverTown Crossings Mall and I want to share my story with you: My child is amazing! He has his quirks and drives me bonkers, but he is amazing! The other day he went to see Santa w the cousins. He said his peace to the old man in red and walked away. While aunt Brittany waited for pictures to print, he went back to Santa bc he wanted to tell him that he has Autism. He was flapping his hands, all excited to let Santa know that he... has autism. Santa sat him next to him and took L's hands in his and started rubbing them, calming them down. Santa asked L if it bothered him, having Autism? L said yes, sometimes. Then Santa told him it shouldn't. It shouldn't bother him to be who he is. L told Santa that sometimes he gets in trouble at school and it's hard for people to understand that he has autism, and that he's not a naughty boy. Santa told L to not worry and that he has been a very good boy being who he is. They sat, and chatted for at least 5 mins. Santa payed close attention and listened to him. This just melts this momma's heart! My child is a great advocate for himself. But this day was different. He opened up to this person about who he was and he was accepted. He wasn't a science experiment, like he gets treated when most people find out he autistic. He was Landon, sitting with Santa and being told that it was ok to be himself. Mommy tells him all the time that he's special and I love him the way he was made, but it's always nice to hear it from others. To be told that it's ok to be who he is.

We have met a lot of amazing people in our Autism journey, but this one made the top of the list. Shout out to the Santa at the RiverTown Crossings Mall. You. are. AMAZING!



THOUGHT BUBBLE 2015 !!!



Thought Bubble is a Comic Art Festival that is held in Leeds every November. There are a week of activities and a weekend ComicCon at the Royal Armouries which includes an exhibition with over 400 tables and a cosplay parade. Specialist Autism Services have attended for the last few years and they have helped to make the event Autism friendly. Here is a photo of our friend David enjoying the festival!

More information is available on their website: <http://thoughtbubblefestival.com>

ASPIEDENT SOCIAL SKILLS COURSE

Six members of the group have recently attended a 4 week social skills course run by Aspiement. James T has written a review of it:

CONTENT:

The Autism and Asperger Consultancy Training provided a wide-ranging course on the subject of social skills; it was specifically designed for those on the autistic spectrum.

The course covered areas such as: learning styles, executive function, social interaction, sensory issues and social chit-chat.

The course included a discussion of both academic models of communication and less esoteric material (at the request of participants) - such as dating, flirting, relationships, etc. The course was therefore flexible and capable of being tailored to the needs of the group. The course content was cumulative; it was therefore ideal for participants to have attended all the four parts. A comprehensive typed handout was provided for each session of the course. These notes will remain a useful source of reference to participants long after the course has finished.

At the conclusion of the course, it was generally felt that it had met its initial objectives - to provide participants with opportunities to acquire and apply social skills, to improve job prospects and, in the widest sense, make it easier to function in the world.

DELIVERY:

The course was delivered by two trainers. The lead role was taken by Dr Elizabeth Guest (who is herself on the autistic spectrum). The role of the second trainer, Jen Blackow, was to reflect the wider “neurotypical perspective” and advise the group of the alternative points of view of the non-autistic population. This dual approach led to a more balanced presentation of the material, and enhanced the delivery of the course by introducing an element of variety.

This course provided scope for considerable audience participation which, at times, was beneficial and relevant. However, one point for development might be the time-limitation of contributions, because some over-enthusiastic participants sometimes prevented the tutors covering all the topic areas that had been planned for each session.

CONCLUSION:

The course provided an insight into some elements of life that “neurotypical” people rarely consider - for example, the way in which autistic people will interpret entirely literally a standard greeting such as “are you all right?” - seeing it as a solicitous enquiry after the health of the person addressed (rather than code for “hello” - a standard social icebreaker).

Dr Guest also used her own experience (it is always interesting for participants to hear about a teacher/lecturer’s own life) to illustrate the difference between shallow and more meaningful relationship. In order to demonstrate shallow relationships Dr Guest cited her experiences of “organised walks arranged by the Sheffield fungus group” (!)

“One may smile, and smile, and be a villain” (Hamlet Act 1 Scene 5)

.....But hey! Shakespeare didn’t have the benefit of attending Dr Guest’s Social Skills Training Course.