

A4H News...

www.aspergers4herts.org Issue 8

NEW SERVICE FOR ASPERGERS

Aspergers is finally put on the map

ADULTS and young people from the age of 16 living with Asperger syndrome will soon be able to access a one-stop shop to help support them through the many challenges they face in daily life.

The new social care service, which reflects the views and concerns of parents and service users, aims to make the transition from child to adult services much smoother, and will give people with AS in Hertfordshire a single point of access for the first time. Asperger Support Advisor at Hertfordshire County Council Mark Dixon told A4H News: "We have listened very carefully to what carers and

service users have been telling us and the new service reflects our consultation with them.

"This will be a new way of working where people will now have a single point of contact for the new service rather than being referred from one service to another.

"We are looking at more of a holistic approach which focuses on the person as a whole, and we expect to be able to build up a stronger rapport with individuals. "The new service reflects evidence that there are more people with AS than we had previously thought. They are all so different, just like everyone else, and we have an

opportunity now to develop a service for people across a very broad spectrum, improving the experience of service users and their carers and families."

A4H News chatted to Asperger support advisors at Hertfordshire County Council Mark Dixon and Dave Cox, and asked them to answer some of the questions you may have about this exciting new service.

Turn to page 2 to read Mark and Dave's responses to the questions we put to them.

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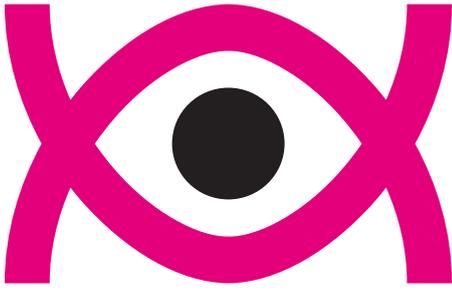
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Question Time

A4H News asked Asperger support advisors Mark Dixon and Dave Cox to explain the new social care service for people living with Asperger syndrome in Hertfordshire, which is our front page story.

Tell us about the new service

The Asperger and High Functioning Autism Team will be made up of a multi-skilled staff group, including social workers, employment support, transition care coordinators and other experts, who will work with and alongside other health professionals to provide an integrated service for people over 16 with Asperger syndrome.

Who can access the new service and when does it start?

The service will work with adults and alongside children's services with young people from the age of 16 to support their transition pathway. People who meet the Fair Access to Care (FAC) criteria will be the main priority for the new service, although individuals whose FAC status may be uncertain will also be helped. The new service begins on 1 April 2013.

What is so different about the new service?

This service will offer a single point of contact, where people will have access to a team of people who are knowledgeable and have understanding of the day-to-day problems people with AS may face. We have recognised that Asperger syndrome does not sit with either learning disability or mental health services and people with AS and their families want to be supported in very different ways.

What sort of issues will the new service deal with?

People will be able to come to us with issues such as care planning, housing, further education, employment, and financial problems. In many cases our work will be to signpost people to the right places to access what they need as citizens of Hertfordshire.

How will I be able to access the service and how much will it cost?

There will be a direct phone line to contact the team. The needs of people known to existing services already will be assessed and they and their carers will be contacted so the new service can be explained to them. The service of the team will be free, however, a small number may incur a charge for some services in line with Hertfordshire's fairer charging policy.

Who is actually running the new service?

The service is being managed by Hertfordshire's Health and Community Services (HCS), supported by and working alongside staff from other partner organisations such as Hertfordshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (HPFT) and key stakeholders.



Dave Cox



Mark Dixon

If you have any other questions you would like to ask Mark and Dave email us at info@aspergers4herts.org and we will pass them on.

Aspergers4Herts has just been awarded charitable status by the Charity Commission in England and Wales. Until now, Aspergers4Herts has been a limited charity trust, relying heavily on fundraising and small donations to keep going. But many major trusts and statutory bodies, as well as other potential donors, will only make grants to registered charities. Now we are a fully-fledged charity we can find new ways to fundraise for exciting projects.

**ASPERGERS
4HERTS**

**WINS CHARITY
STATUS**



Aspergers

In the headlines!!



Luke Treadaway (Christopher) and Niamh Cusack (Siobhan). Photo by Manuel Harlan.

Curious Incident success

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time theatre production played to sell out audiences at the National Theatre. The production was based on the book by Mark Haddon, which tells the story of a boy who appears to have Asperger syndrome. The Telegraph described it as 'funny and extremely moving'.

The Guardian called it a 'highly skilful adaptation', and The Standard declared: "The Curious Incident is a success from any angle".

The production transfers to the Apollo Theatre in the West End from March 1 2013. **For more details visit www.nationaltheatre.org.uk**



FreeGary.org.uk

End to McKinnon's 10 year battle

Computer hacker Gary McKinnon, whose extradition to the US was blocked, will not face any charges in the UK. Gary McKinnon, who has Asperger syndrome, admits accessing US computers but says he was looking for evidence of UFOs.

His mum, Janis Sharp, who lives in Brookman's Park, told BBC News: "I feel the 10 years have been gruelling, it's been life-destroying. To have this over is amazing. Gary's gone through enough."

ANIMAL MAGIC FOR KATIE!

Crocodiles, snakes, porcupine, meerkats ...it's all in a day's work for Aspergers 4 Herts member Katie! For Katie, 18, is doing a three year course in animal care at Shuttleworth College, Bedford, and gets to learn about – and deal with - all kinds of unusual creatures. Katie, who previously completed a one-year StopGap course, says she never knows from day to day what she might be doing next, but much prefers

it to sitting behind a desk. Katie told A4H News: "We do a mixture of written and practical work, which includes cleaning out cages and feeding and handling the animals. We learn how to behave around the animals and how to reduce their stress, as well as about what habitat they need. "Every day is different. I really enjoy working with the goats as they have their own personalities, climb on your

shoulders, eat your overalls and try and attack one another. " Katie added: "I have always liked animals even though I don't have any pets at home. I would like to work with guide dogs or snifferdogs in the future."

Are you doing an interesting course or job? E-mail us at info@aspergers4herts.org

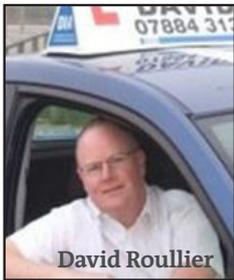
Jack in the driving seat

NEW driver Jack Wallis is urging other A4H members who are finding it difficult to pass their test to keep persevering.



Jack Wallis

Jack, 19, lost count of the number of driving lessons he had before he finally passed his test on the third attempt. He also failed the theory test twice.



David Roullier

He says other people with Asperger syndrome who haven't yet managed to

get their driving licence should not give up hope.

He told A4H News: "I couldn't believe it when I finally passed my test and I felt very relieved. I would certainly encourage others to keep going.

"It has been great to be able to drive – now I have more

freedom and can avoid the misery of public transport." Jack, who is doing a two year creative media course at Hitchin College, said he found the theory part of the test 'tricky'. He also stressed that you should ensure you have a committed driving instructor.

Jack's driving instructor David Roullier, who runs David's Motor School in Stevenage, said: "Jack's mum told me before he started lessons that he had Aspergers but to be quite honest I didn't really have to make a lot of allowance for it.

"He was determined to pass. Learning to drive is a big deal for teenagers as they want to be independent. Conditions like this should not hold them back."

The National Autistic Society says: "As autism is a spectrum disorder it is impossible to say that people with autism either should or should not be allowed to drive. Some people with autism may find this skill extremely difficult to grasp, while others will be highly competent drivers." Barriers to holding a licence might include a history of epilepsy, difficulties with multi-tasking, perceptual problems and poor motor control or dyspraxia.

The rules that require you to disclose a diagnosis of an ASD and procedure for applying for a driving licence can be found on the DVLA website: www.dvla.gov.uk/medical.aspx

**Need more help?
Ring the NAS Helpline on
0808 800 4104**

Test yourself - do you know your theory?

1. You are on a road that has no traffic signs. There are street lights. What is the speed limit?

- A – 20mph
- B – 30mph
- C – 40 mph
- D – 60 mph

2. When should you NOT use your horn in a built-up area?

- A – Between 8pm and 8am
- B – Between 9pm and dawn
- C – Between dusk and 8am
- D - Between 11.30pm and 7am

3. You should switch your rear fog lights on when visibility drops below

- A – Your overall stopping distance
- B – Ten car lengths
- C – 200 metres (656 feet)
- D – 100 metres (328 feet)

4. You are driving down a steep hill. Why could keeping the clutch down or rolling in neutral for too long be dangerous?

- A – Fuel consumption will be higher

- B – Your vehicle will pick up speed
- C- It will damage the engine
- D – It will wear tyres out more quickly



Reproduced by Permission of the Driving Standards Agency

Answers are on page 7

Robyn Steward



Robyn Steward was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome at the age of 11. Now 25, she provides specialist training courses for professionals working with or supporting children or adults on the autistic spectrum, including Asperger syndrome. She is also an ambassador for the National Autistic Society. In a recent Independent online blog she shared her thoughts and experiences of living with Asperger syndrome.

“I feel as if my thoughts are a series of cogs moving around my brain, but it feels as if someone has eaten toffee near the cogs so now some of them keep sticking. It’s like when you have a piece of chewing gum stuck on your shoe: you only notice when you lift that part of the shoe off the ground.

One of the reasons I feel this way is because I’ve been alone on a plane for 11 hours. There are hundreds of other people on this flight but most will not understand autism. All my life people have thought I was “weird”, “retarded” or a “freak”. I am none of those labels. I have a type of autism known as Asperger syndrome, but first and foremost I am a human being.

My daily experience is often just an extreme version of life.

I’m stressed and can’t process what is going on around me in order. I don’t know what to pay attention to. Is the ache in my stomach insignificant or is it appendicitis? I have to be vigilant to watch out for people talking directly to me. Events can also seem as if they are just miraculously happening rather than linking to each other.

I find body language difficult to read, especially when I’m stressed, so sometimes I can’t tell if I’m being spoken to, and nobody knows my name so I’m a bit stuck. If I get up to go to the loo I can get worried that I won’t be able to tell who is in the queue and who isn’t, and that I might then push in without meaning to. Now at least I could explain that I have Asperger syndrome but when I was at school **I couldn’t and the other kids may not have understood, so I spent a lot of time being bullied, and believing I was a “freak”.**

Every year I go on a self-organised speaking tour in the USA. The first time I went my Mum told me that she didn’t think I’d be able to cope with the airport. She’s right; airports are overwhelming, but they also have structure and rules – you can get special assistance which means you get put in a wheelchair, and this means people understand you have a disability.

Since autism is a hidden disability most people do not know I am autistic. I find queuing very hard because it seems as though the queuing will be infinite and I am upset by this. I cannot reassure myself with an approximate time when queuing will be over, as it would be impossible to know. So I decided not to tell my parents I was going to L.A., San Francisco

and New York. Because of the sensory issues I have when the pressure changes I had only ever been on a plane twice before. It feels like my head is going to explode.

American English is obviously different to British English, but as someone with autism who struggles to read body language, social cues and doesn’t naturally see the context of a situation, I felt it was important to learn how Americans spoke, and alternative words to make myself understood. For example, to say sidewalk rather than pavement.

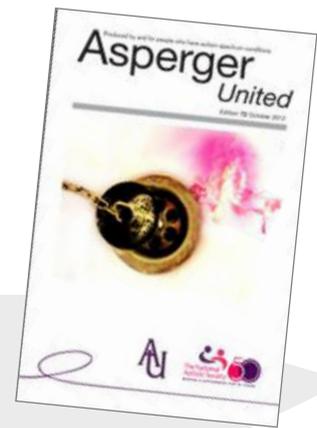
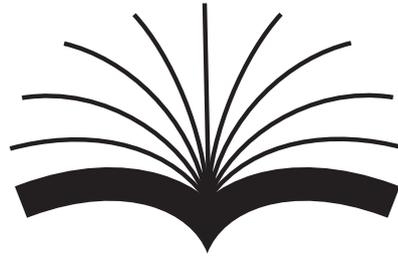
There are a number of types of autism, collectively known as the autistic spectrum. But each person is different, and you need to learn what is important to them. For example, do they take things literally? Do they need you to write down instructions rather than speak to them? Do they need ear plugs?

Some of the most successful people have been on the Autistic Spectrum, such as Mozart and Einstein. Autism has its challenge, but essentially the condition is a cluster of extreme human behaviours and experiences. It is a neurological condition meaning that the brain is wired differently. The impact someone has on the world does not have to be about scale but about the effect on the people around that person.

An original version of this blog was first published by the Independent Online

To find out more about Robyn visit her website at www.robysteward.com

Aspies unite!



Fed up reading the same old magazines? Maybe it's worth giving Asperger United a try.

It's a quarterly magazine for ages 16+ which is written by people with Asperger syndrome for people with Asperger syndrome. Each issue contains personal accounts of having Asperger syndrome or autism, and there is a pen pal page, letters to the editor, and poems, artwork and short stories.

Subscription is free, and you can download a copy by visiting www.autism.org.uk

Teaching us to talk

Do you sometimes wish you could get more help to ensure your youngster is getting the most out of their time at school?

If your child has special educational needs and disabilities and is aged two to 25, you can contact a service for parents which may be able to give you a helping hand.

The Hertfordshire Parent Partnership Service can provide information and advice, help you write reports and letters, prepare for meetings and direct you to other services.

Just ring the Parent Partnership helpline on **01992 555847** Mon to Thurs 9.30am to 1.30pm

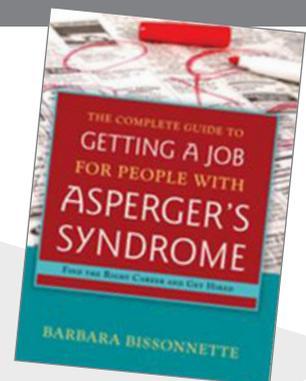
BOOKSHELF

Getting a job for people with Asperger's Syndrome

Barbara Bissonnette

Finding a job is a confusing and anxiety-provoking process for many individuals with Asperger's Syndrome. This practical "how-to" guide describes exactly what it takes to get hired in the neurotypical workplace. Every aspect of finding employment is covered, from defining strengths and researching occupations to projecting confidence in interviews.

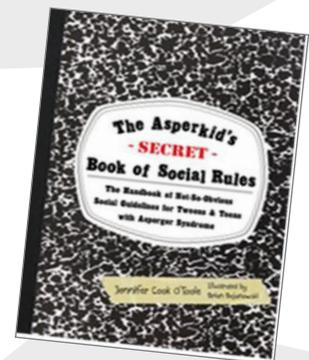
Published December 2012, Paperback: £14.99.



The Asperkid's secret book of social rules

Jennifer Cook O'Toole Illustrated by Brian Bojanowski

The Asperkid's (Secret) Book of Social Rules offers witty insights into baffling social codes such as making and keeping friends, and common conversation pitfalls. Ideal for all 10-17 year olds with Asperger syndrome, this book provides inside information on over thirty social rules helping Asperkids to navigate the mysterious world around them. Published October 2012, Paperback £13.99





Dr Shivani Sharma

Aspergers 4 Herts would like to say a special thanks to...

Bassingbourn Bingo Club for their generous donation of £50

Fay Bardell for her kind donations. Fay is the grandmother of one of our members and feels passionate about helping people with AS.

Getting the most out of friendships

Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (including people with Asperger syndrome) like making friendships with peers who are similar to them - according to a project carried out at the University of Hertfordshire.

In a recent study, 18 children and adolescents with ASD completed questionnaires and took part in an interview on peer relationships. The interviews used repertory grids that are part of Personal Construct Psychology. The grids involved participants developing a list of characteristics that describe different people and for each stating its opposite (e.g. friendly and unfriendly). Participants used a grid to rate people they

know on the characteristics identified. For example, 'I' have a 'good sense of humour', a 'child I like at school' is 'smiley'. The results showed that peers who were perceived to be similar to participants were rated higher in likeability. The more people participants knew who were similar to them, the more likely they were to be happy in their social life. The research was supervised by Dr Shivani Sharma. She told A4H news: "The findings

suggest that Personal Construct Psychology is useful to help individuals with ASD talk about relationships. They also tell us something about the types of friendship groups that may work well. For example, there were common themes in the characteristics of people that were important to our participants. This includes things such as others being seen to be helpful, funny, happy, smiley, and structured."

For more information on this project and other autism research being carried out at the University contact s.3.sharma@herts.ac.uk

Driving theory Test yourself answers from page 4: 1. B 2. D 3. D 4. B

