

Autkids™

Issue 8
Summer 2010
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Positive Parenting for Children with Autism Spectrum Conditions

INSIDE:

Stars of the Small Screen

Help! Teach my techie whizz-kid to socialise!



Staying Out for the Summer

Our autism-friendly guide to great places



Sand, Sea ...Sensory Integration!

Great sensory games for hot weather



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Letter from the Editors



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Hi AuKids readers! Welcome to our



CHEQUE IT OUT:
(Left to right) Jo, Debby and Tori all pushed up to receive our grant from Cash For Kids.

YES, it's already been two years since we first dreamed up the idea of a parenting magazine. So what do you think of the story so far? Write and let us know your views!

We had a cracking start to the summer with the news that AuKids had been awarded a £2,000 grant from Manchester radio station Key 103 as part of its Cash For Kids campaign.

We picked up the cheque at an awards ceremony at Key 103 on June 23rd. The day after the presentation we found out that stationery company Viking Direct had given us a grant of £1,000. This will see us well on the way to becoming a stable operation next year. We are still looking for print sponsors, that's the main thing now. Also, after some talks with the National Autistic Society, they've agreed to offer us some support in raising the profile of the magazine. Cheers guys!

Not forgetting our good friends Studio North, who have created a great promotional leaflet and posters for us - thanks to Lula and her sister Scarlett, Oscar, Lesley, Ed and Delta for being our fantastic models! If you need any AuKids leaflets for YOUR support group or school, get in touch at aukidsmag@gmail.com!

It's a fabulous summer issue if we say so ourselves. Occupational therapist Tina Wood has come on board to share some fun games for summer that will also help with sensory integration. Our Ask the Experts focuses on a common problem experienced by ALL parents, but ours to a greater extent - how the heck do you get your child to socialise if they're addicted to their computer? Read on to find out.

We've also reproduced extracts from an article written by Jim Sinclair, an adult with ASC, which we really wanted to share with you. Jim's piece pulls no punches but it's a thought provoking argument about why it's so important for a child that parents remain positive.

We've done our research, plus a bit of trotting about the UK, to bring you our top places to visit this summer - with autism in mind, of course. Plus the usual news, reviews and tips. Phew, we hope you enjoy it. Happy reading!

Keep up-to-date with us through Facebook and Twitter.

To round off before you head back to your ice lolly and paddling pool - please continue to spread the word and also to tell other parents about the magazine. The more subscribers we have, the closer we'll get to becoming self-sufficient. We still need sponsorship support to print the magazine beyond this year. Then we can focus on what we do best - writing AuKids!

Have a fabulous summer - see you in October!

Tori and Debby

Our front cover star is Ebrima Senghore, see spotlight Page 12.

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Orchids are beautiful plants which, much like kids with autism, require very specific conditions to grow. If they get them, they thrive. That's why we called this magazine AuKids. AU is also the chemical symbol for gold.



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International Conference Brings Research Together

The ninth Annual International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) in May hosted more than 1,800 researchers, delegates, autism specialists and students in the world's largest gathering of researchers and clinicians devoted to a better understanding of autism.



Eric Courchesne

At the press conference ahead of the event, scientists reported on key studies that would be featured. Dr. Susan Hyman of the University of Rochester reported on her study that shows the gluten free casein free (GFCF) diet does not appear beneficial for children with autism.

"It would have been wonderful for children with autism and their families if we found that the gluten-free, casein-free diet could really help, but this study didn't show significant benefits," said Dr. Hyman.

"The removal of gluten and casein from the diet of a controlled group of young children with autism did not demonstrate a change in sleep habits, bowel habits, activity or core symptoms of autism," Hyman said.

Dr. Eric Courchesne of University California, San Diego, spoke at the press conference about his study showing a simple brain scan performed in infants and toddlers may be a biomarker for autism leading to early detection and early intervention.

The test involved using functional MRI to measure brain responses to spoken words in sleeping children.

And...remember our article about staying together in spring? It appears we have fallen foul of a myth. Another study shows that divorce rates are similar for parents with and without children with autism.

Also at the meeting, a team from Seaside Therapeutics in Cambridge, Massachusetts, reported results from early clinical trials suggesting that new drugs could address some of the classic symptoms of autism.

Randall Carpenter's team is testing a drug called arbaclofen on people with Fragile X Syndrome, which is associated with autism. People with Fragile X carry a mutation in the gene involved with strengthening brain connections associated with salient experiences. The drug appears to reverse the effects of the mutation and early results appear to indicate better social functioning.



Trial had an ImPACT

The Pre-school Autism Communication Trial (PACT) involved children aged two-five years with a primary diagnosis of autism. Of the 144 children referred across three sites (Manchester, London and Newcastle), 50 per cent were randomly chosen for the trial, which involved regular intensive communication sessions with highly trained speech and language therapists for 12 months. The other 50 per cent received treatment as usual.

Although initial findings, published in The Lancet in May, showed that the intervention did not significantly reduce autism symptoms, further analysis revealed that the intervention *did* increase parent synchrony (being in tune with a child) which led to an increase in child initiations.

Mum Yvonne, who took part in the intervention, reports: "The intervention was all about improving joint attention and shared enjoyment. It taught me to interact with Aran in a very non-directive way, following his lead, rather than trying to get him to play and behave 'typically'. I also learnt to adapt the timing of my spoken words to be synchronised with his actions."

AuKids co-editor Tori Houghton, a speech and language therapist specializing in autism, was one of the therapists for the PACT project. She said: "Although the PACT results showed no direct changes in the symptoms of autism in the short term, the long-term effects may be beneficial in terms of improving social interactions, the quality of which was already starting to change at the end of the project."

"The PACT intervention helped parents to pick up on even the subtlest communication signals and to celebrate all successes. Parents reported seeing their autistic children more positively, thus improving their relationship with their child."

For more information on the trial go to www.medicine.manchester.ac.uk/pact

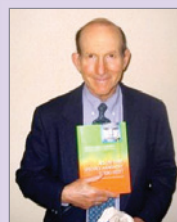
New Law Improves Education

The Children, Schools and Families Bill became law on 8th April 2010, meaning that some key changes that The National Autistic Society (NAS) has been calling for will now be legal requirements.

Ofsted now has an obligation to report on special educational needs and disability issues during a school inspection. There will also be a new right of appeal to tribunal if a local authority refuses to amend a Statement at annual review. The NAS has been calling for both of these changes for some time.

The new law also sets out that local authorities will be required to provide full-time education for children and young people who for medical, social or emotional reasons are not in school but in alternative provision, unless there are strong reasons for not doing so. Following pressure from the NAS, this section was strengthened as the Bill passed through Parliament.

America Mourns Child Development Expert



Dr Stanley Greenspan M.D. was Clinical Professor of Psychiatry and Paediatrics at George Washington University Medical School and Chairman of the Interdisciplinary Council on

Developmental and Learning Disorders. The world's foremost authority on clinical work with infants and young children with developmental and emotional problems, his work has guided parents, professionals and researchers all over the world. He was a great supporter of the Sensory Processing Disorder Foundation's (USA) work with children and adults who have sensory processing issues. Dr. Greenspan knew early on that intervention for sensory issues in children was a crucial step towards ameliorating engagement and social issues.

To find out more about Dr Greenspan and view a YouTube clip of him at work, look up www.stanleygreenspan.com. Dr Greenspan's many publications include **Engaging Autism: Using the Floortime Approach to Help Children Relate, Communicate, and Think** and **The Child with Special Needs: Encouraging Intellectual and Emotional Growth**, both available through Amazon.

Largest Ever Genetic Study Reveals Links with Autism

In June, the largest study ever to look at the genetics of autism was published in Nature. Scientists have identified rare genetic variations that were 20 per cent more frequent in children with autism than in children without the disorder. These so-called 'copy number variations' (CNV), which can be missing chunks or extra copies of DNA in and around the genes, occur in less than one in 100 people in the general population.

In the study, scientists compared the incidence of these rare CNVs in 996 people with autism spectrum disorders and 1,287 unaffected people.

MMR Row Doctor Struck Off

The doctor at the centre of the row over the MMR vaccine, Andrew Wakefield, was struck off the medical register in May by the General Medical Council.

Wakefield was found guilty of serious professional misconduct while carrying out research into a possible link between the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine and autism.

NAS Warns Caution Over 'Test' Research

Another recent study suggests that differences in urine samples could pave the way for a diagnostic test for autism. The National Autistic Society urged caution, however: "The research was only an initial observation of differences and was based on results from a very small number of children. It also focused on children with gastrointestinal symptoms, and it is therefore unclear how the results would be reflected in the wider population", said a spokesperson for the society.

Don't Mourn For Us

Jim Sinclair is an adult with Asperger Syndrome who formed Autism Network International in 1992, an autistic-run self-help and advocacy organisation for autistic people. The full article Don't Mourn For Us was originally published in Our Voice, the organisation's newsletter Volume 1, Number 3, in 1993.

When we came across it, we found it so touching both from a parent and professional perspective that we felt we had to share it with you. The following article contains the main extracts from his piece.

- Tori Houghton.

Parents often report that learning their child is autistic was the most traumatic thing that ever happened to them. Non-autistic people can see autism as a great tragedy, and parents experience continuing disappointment and grief at all stages of the child's and family's life cycle.

But this grief does not stem from the child's autism itself. It is grief over the loss of the normal child the parents had hoped and expected to have. Parents' attitudes and expectations, and the discrepancies between what parents expect of children at a particular age and their own child's actual development, cause more stress and anguish than the practical complexities of life with an autistic person.

Some amount of grief is natural as you adjust to the fact that an event and a relationship you've been looking forward to isn't going to materialize. But this grief over a fantasized 'normal' child needs to be separated from a parent's perceptions of the child they do have - an autistic child who can form very meaningful relationships with the carers who support them if given the opportunity.

The continuing grief surrounding a child's autism is damaging for both parent and child and precludes the development of an accepting and authentic relationship between them.

For your own sake and the sake of your children, I invite you to look at our autism - and your grief - from our perspective.

Autism is a way of being

Autism isn't something a person has, or a shell that a person is trapped inside. There's no 'normal' child hidden behind the autism. Autism is pervasive; it colours every experience, every sensation, perception, thought, emotion, and encounter, every aspect of existence.

Autism is a way of being. It is not possible to separate the person from the autism.

Therefore, when parents say "I wish my child did not have autism", what they're really saying is: "I wish the autistic child I have did not exist, and I had a different (non-autistic) child instead."

Read that again. This is what we hear when you mourn over our existence. This is what we hear when you pray for a cure. This is what we know, when you tell us of your fondest hopes and dreams for us: that your greatest wish is that one day we will cease to be and strangers you can love will move in behind our faces.

Autism is not an impenetrable wall

You try to relate to your autistic child, and the child doesn't respond. He doesn't see you; you can't reach her; there's no getting through. That's the hardest thing to deal with, isn't it? The only thing is, it isn't true.

Look at it again: You try to relate as parent to

"Approach respectfully, without preconceptions and with openness to learning new things, and you'll find a world you could never have imagined."

child, using your own understanding of normal children, your own feelings about parenthood, your own experiences and intuitions about relationships. And the child doesn't respond in any way you can recognize as being part of that system.

That does not mean the child is incapable of relating at all. It only means you're assuming a shared system, a shared understanding of signals and meanings, that the child in fact does not share.

It's as if you tried to have an intimate conversation with someone who has no comprehension of your language. Of course the person won't understand what you're talking about, won't respond in the way you expect, and may well find the whole interaction confusing and unpleasant.

It takes more work to communicate with someone whose native language isn't the same as

yours. And autism goes deeper than language and culture; autistic people are 'foreigners' in any society.

You're going to have to give up your assumptions about shared meanings. You're going to have to learn to move back up to levels more basic than you've probably thought about before, to translate, and to check to make sure your translations are understood. You're going to have to give up the certainty that comes through being in your own familiar territory, of knowing you're in charge, and let your child teach you a little of her language, guide you a little way into his world.

And the outcome, if you succeed, still won't be a normal parent-child relationship. Your autistic child may learn to talk, may attend regular classes in school, may go to college, drive a car, live independently, have a career even - but will never relate to you as other children relate to their parents.

Or, your autistic child may never speak, may graduate from a self-contained special education classroom to a sheltered activity programme or a residential facility, may need lifelong full-time care and supervision - but is not completely beyond your reach. The ways we relate are different. Push for the things your expectations tell you are normal, and you'll find frustration, disappointment, resentment, maybe even rage and hatred.

Approach respectfully, without preconceptions and with openness to learning new things, and you'll find a world you could never have imagined.

It can be done. Each of us who does learn to talk to you, each of us who manages to function at all in your society, each of us who manages to reach out and make a connection with you, is operating in alien territory, making contact with alien beings. We spend our entire lives doing this. And then you tell us that we can't relate.

Autism is not death

Much of the grieving parents do is over the non-occurrence of the expected relationship with an expected normal child. This grief is very real, and it needs to be expected and worked through so people can get on with their lives.

It isn't about autism, though. It's about shattered expectations. I suggest that the best place to address these issues is not in organizations devoted to autism, but in counselling and support groups. In those settings parents learn to come to terms with their loss.

You didn't lose a child to autism. You lost a child because the child you waited for never came into existence. That isn't our fault and it shouldn't be our burden. We need and deserve families who can see us and value us for ourselves.

Grieve if you must, for your own lost dreams. But don't mourn for us. We are alive. We are real. And we're here waiting for you.

Senses Working Overtime

This summer, larking about can be as beneficial to your child as any formal therapy.

Most children with autism have sensory processing difficulties to one extent or another. This means that the 'channels' through which they receive input from the main senses can be extra or under sensitive.

If you think that your child may be experiencing sensory integration difficulties, ask your paediatrician for a referral to an occupational therapist.

For this feature, our own speech and language therapist Tori Houghton has teamed up with occupational therapist Tina Wood to offer ideas that can

benefit communication as well as sensory integration.



Our smiley face symbol refers to communication benefits, and the hand refers to sensory integration.



And as if this article isn't exciting enough, we've also given each sub-heading a famous song title. All you have to do is write to us with the band names for all 11 songs (including our main headline) and the first three correct answers sent in before the end of September will receive a limited edition AuKids key ring. Ooooooh. We know, we spoil you. Send your answers to aukidsmag@gmail.com or write to us at AuKids, PO Box 259, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 9BE.

1. Going Underground

Garden obstacle courses are great for sensory integration work. Include crawling under heavy mats/blankets for **deep pressure (a)** and crawling over partially filled airbeds for **vestibular (e)** input.

Encourage your child to follow instructions and take turns.



5. Splish, Splash

Modify water play to your child's preferences - carrying heavy water bombs can help to increase **heavy work (c)** if you can cope with the mess! By adding objects/toys to the paddling pool, sorting and matching games can be played.

See if you can predict which toys will sink and which ones will float! Just saying the words "sink?" or "float?" over and over again whilst you're both focusing on the activity will help their language. This is a fun way of your child engaging others and making choices.

8. Space Cowboy

Space Hoppers provide excellent **proprioceptive (b)** and **vestibular (e)** input.

See if you can take turns bouncing on a Space Hopper, count how many bounces before you fall off, or just say "bounce, bounce!" over and over again to reinforce learning language whilst having fun.



9. Walk On the Wild Side

Even simple walks in the countryside or beach can provide opportunities for good vestibular input and can also provide proprioceptive input if you encourage your child to wear a rucksack. The more resistance under foot, the heavier the work (e.g. wading in water provides great resistance and is excellent heavy work).

Label the things that they find interesting when you go out for a walk using language mapping. Rather than showing them things, comment on what they choose to focus on. That way the language you use is more likely to stick. E.g. "Feather! Soft feather."

10. Jump to the Beat

Trampolining gives vertical linear movement and deep pressure which increases with the G force it creates. Jumping to a steady rhythm can be organising for the brain - look up www.sensorytools.net to buy Gen Jereb's fab 'Say G'day' and 'Jumpin' Jellybeans' CDs, designed specifically to accompany sensory integration exercises.

Provide opportunities for eye contact and help them to listen to instructions by sharing the trampoline.

6. Sultans of Swing

The linear movement a swing provides can be calming for the nervous system as well as providing a regulating rhythm. Pulling on a rope that the adult holds whilst swinging, if they can manage to stay on, increases resistance and is good heavy work. Otherwise swinging their own legs is still good for sensory integration.

Swings are great activities for helping them to request "more" verbally, with **PECS (g)** or through sign language.



7. Sign Your Name

Large chalks on outdoor surfaces give increased resistance and therefore heavy work for the body. It's also a fun way of practising writing patterns as is writing with hands/fingers or spades on the beach.

As with all the games, this gives opportunities for **language mapping (f)**.



2. Circle in the Sand

If your child is sensitive to touch, grade the amount of sand they have to touch (perhaps even start by using a spade). Encourage the experience of touching both wet and dry sand to desensitise them. Hide toys in sand to provide opportunities for commenting and to build visual and tactile discrimination skills.

Build sandcastles and mud pies and introduce words such as scoop, pat, fill and crash. Activities like this are useful for hearing the same words over and over. They are also opportunities to practise counting.

3. Smooth Operator

If your child enjoys them, tactile activities such as rubbing lotion into each other's hands or feet can help to develop **proprioceptive (b)** awareness.

It also provides a shared focus for joint attention and language opportunities. Name body parts as you rub sun lotion in. Pause and see if they can point to any spontaneously - take your time!

4. Blowin' in the Wind

Blowing bubbles is fab for providing opportunities for bi-lateral hand/eye co-ordination if catching them!

Blowing bubbles also helps to develop the **oromotor (d)** skills required for speech development.

The Science Bit

USEFUL TERMS

With the right amount of sensory input our bodies feel calm, alert and ready to tackle daily challenges.

a. Deep pressure input by using something heavy or hugging/squashing games or firm massage, can be calming for a child who swings between being over and under-active. When done correctly, over time it can help to create an optimum state of alertness.

b. Proprioception is the sense of knowing where parts of our body are (without vision).

c. 'Heavy work' refers to proprioceptive input - our brains register it when we use our muscles and joints. So rather than just running about, games involving pushing (trucks/carts etc), pulling (tug o war), wheelbarrow walks and other types of resistance 'work' can help organise the brain's proprioceptive system and calm the nervous system as a whole.

d. Oromotor refers to the brain's pathways that control the speech muscles.

e. The vestibular system helps us to maintain balance and move through space by sending information to the brain.

f. Language mapping is when you provide a simple commentary on your child's play. "The train's going **up** the hill! The train's going **down** the hill!" If you do this constantly whilst watching them, it has several benefits. They know that you find their play important without having to interfere, and are more likely to want you to join in. You're also 'modelling' the correct words repetitively. The more you say the same word, (however dull that seems) the more likely they are to learn it.

g. PECS is the Picture Exchange Communication System: Children use symbols or pictures to request preferred objects or activities. It's great to develop this in non-verbal children because it gets them used to initiating conversation themselves (non-verbal children can become quite passive communicators if not encouraged to tell others their needs). Highly motivating activities can provide opportunities for your child to develop the PECS system. So have a photo of sand and the paddling pool at the ready for them to choose from.

USEFUL READING

The Out of Sync Child - Recognizing and Coping with Sensory Processing Disorder by Carol Stock Kranowitz, published by Perigee. ISBN 9780399531651

The Out of Sync Child has Fun - Activities for Kids with Sensory Processing Disorder, by Carol Stock Kranowitz, published by Perigee. ISBN 9780399532719

Motivate to Communicate - 300 Games and Activities for Your Child with Autism, by Simone Griffin and Dianne Sandler, published by Jessica Kingsley. ISBN 9781849050418

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Ask the Experts



“My child is into computers and focuses on things he can play by himself. How do I get him to socialise?”



Katie Moizer

Katie is a Chartered Clinical Psychologist who provides specialist services to children with autism and their families both for the NHS and independently.

For more information look up www.childconcerns.com or call 0788 605 5043.

The first thing to consider here is how important this is and who for? In my experience anxieties regarding ‘insular behaviour’ often comes from parents as opposed to the child and trying to radically modify the behaviour can be more anxiety provoking and distressing for all, than if it’s left alone.

Consider the full picture. Ask yourself exactly how much time your child spends alone. Is there a reasonable balance given he has autism? You may find that your child actually spends a lot of time in social contexts (such as school; mealtimes) and then chooses to play alone at home because it’s relaxing. Alternatively, does your child wish to socialise more but doesn’t know how? Is it something they wish to address?

If you (and preferably your child) decide this is something you would like to address, you may wish to start by introducing computer games that require two people. This should facilitate some interaction whilst focusing on your child’s preferred way of playing, thus being less anxiety provoking for him.

You may then want to introduce activities away from the computer. Start small and gradually build this up. I suggest this is negotiated with your child and strategies are put into place to facilitate this process, such as a signal your child can use to alert you if he is feeling overwhelmed, along with a promise that your child can do as he wishes once the agreed ‘task’ is complete. Above all, it’s important to keep things as relaxed as possible.



Tori Houghton

Specialist speech and language therapist in autism.

Many young people with autism find the ‘directness’ of face-to-face social interaction and communication difficult. There are so many variable factors to consider in interaction - particularly with non-verbal signals - which people with autism find confusing. Many people who are considered ‘lower functioning’ may struggle to develop functional speech because of this reason yet are able to write/type/use pictures effectively to



Peter Lawson

Services manager at the Stockport branch of Cygnet Springside, a facility which provides specialist autism residential and outreach services.

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Whilst the obvious aim is to encourage your child to engage in activities away from the computer screen, have you considered playing him at his own game? We have had some significant success with autistic young people ‘obsessed’ with video games. In some instances, this has been achieved by joining in the computer gaming as ‘player 2’ and then, over the course of a few gaming sessions, introducing video games which reflect positive real-life activities, for example golf and football.

These games can actually be used in

articulate their thoughts and feelings.

The predictability a computer may provide and the lack of complicated non-verbal messages to interpret often make this an effective way of interacting with the world for autistic people.

In this day and age we use a variety of technical means in which to interact with our peers e.g. texting/Facebook. Capitalise on your son’s interest and encourage these skills under supervision, in ways which he can use to communicate with others in a non-threatening way.

Many of his peers will be interested in similar games, so use this interest to help develop his conversational skills, first with you, then with siblings and/or peers. The latest computer craze may be an important topic of conversation in which he can be encouraged and supported to discuss with his peers.

a positive way as precursors to involvement in ‘real life’ activities; however, a planned and structured approach is required, along with a willingness to literally play along for a while in order to achieve positive outcomes!

Try introducing your son to video games which provide an opportunity to discuss their real life counterparts, like sports games. Some computer games (particularly those on the Nintendo Wii console) actually encourage physical activity and group participation, whilst retaining the basic premise of video gaming and therefore might be worth considering as an alternative to your son’s current games console.

Discourage your child in becoming involved in ‘on-line’ gaming; whilst this arguably provides opportunities to socialise, it is at best a ‘remote’ social activity, which is no replacement for real-life social interactions and at worst, can be very time consuming; moreover, you never really know who is on the other end of the line....

The bottom line is to play along and consider ways of turning a potentially negative activity into one that could lead to positive outcomes!

“Kids with autism, even ones who are high on the spectrum, need lots of alone time. It’s good for them, it helps them re-energise.”

‘Wuffles’, an adult with Asperger Syndrome, quoted from wrongplanet.net



DID YOU KNOW?

The Danish company Specialisterne only employs software testers who are autistic, because of their efficiency, attention to detail, focus and accuracy. Computer skills are highly transferrable and often highly desirable. So remember, today's obsession could be tomorrow's lucrative career!



Luke Beardon

Luke is a senior lecturer in autism at The Autism Centre, Sheffield Hallam University

Socialising is an extremely common characteristic of the Predominant Neurotype (PNT) - and is often deemed highly important and valued. An easy mistake to make is to apply the same value system onto children with autism - whereas, in fact, by definition the autistic child is highly likely to have a very different set of needs when it comes to social interaction - for a whole host of reasons. Sometimes, simply, the child has no interest in other children - to force the issue in such an instance would be unwarranted

and unfair, and is sometimes more a reflection on what other people want rather than what is best for the child. However, it may be that the child has had such bad experiences previously that s/he becomes reticent and withdrawn - this is far more problematic. The critical question I believe is: when on his/her own, is the child content and happy - or lonely and depressed? In the former instance it may well be prudent to allow the child to develop in his/her own time. In the latter, there needs to be some input.

Computers are not necessarily the isolating beasts that they are sometimes made out to be - in fact, in this day and age the online community (including gaming) has its own type of valid socialising which can suit children with autism very well indeed. Using the computer (safely) to engage with others can be one of the most 'autism friendly' ways to develop social interaction; my advice would be to see this as an opportunity rather than a problem.

Tips

Penguin Pals

At www.clubpenguin.com, kids can socialise safely and they don't even have to have that much language. Your child will 'become' a virtual penguin, play in the snow and adopt a pet 'Puffle'! They can choose various phrases and emoticons from drop down menus. Designed for young kids, it's great fun and Disney, which owns the site, monitors it carefully. The basic version is free, or you can pay a fee for extras such as being able to furnish your own igloo...no, we're not kidding.



Friendly Forum

www.wrongplanet.net is a fantastic forum for slightly older children with autism or Asperger's. Run by adults on the spectrum this website is useful for parents who can post queries and receive real and honest insight into the every day difficulties and challenges our children face. It is also a great forum for older children to find out about their diagnosis from people who know.

A Tangled Web

BBC's Newsround has put together a special programme all about staying safe on the internet.

Called *Caught in the Web*, it tells the story of a girl who gets into trouble after her virtual life in an online chatroom spills into the real world. There are also real-life case studies with kids who've had bad experiences online, like a girl who was cyber bullied and a boy addicted to gaming.

The programme is narrated by former Doctor Who star David Tennant.

You can see it at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/news/8490000/newsid_8495700/8495786.stm



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Note from the editors: There seems to be a consensus among our panel that when used responsibly and safely under supervision, computers can provide very positive opportunities for engagement and interaction. None of our panel view computers as an exclusive means by which children with autism should communicate.

Yet although they're not entirely agreed on the exact methods used, they do agree on one thing. When kids DO enjoy computers, we don't need to stop them! We can use it to their advantage... after all, it's something that they'll have in common with many of their 'neuro-typical' friends - and prowess at the PC can become a precious status symbol for those who fall behind in other areas.



Do you have a question for Ask the Experts? E-mail us at aukidsmag@gmail.com





READY STEADY GO... FOR SUMMER!

ARRRRRGHHHH! It's the summer holidays. Let's not pretend they're relaxing, eh? We know what it's like, most of the time you're running around trying to find a place to visit that's autism-friendly.

Well, we've tried all the attractions below and we reckon that these places are a pretty good bet for autistic kids.

With thanks to the National Autistic Society for adding some of their own ideas. For more great inspiration, look up www.nas.org.uk and search Holidays and Days Out.



Thomas Land

AT DRAYTON MANOR PARK, STAFFORDSHIRE.




ALL ABOARD: Tori poses with Bobby and Alec (oh...and Henry) at Thomas Land. Bobby would have happily stayed the night at the engine 'shed'.

No self-respecting list of places to visit would be worth its salt (or 'Salty' if you know your engines) without a visit to Thomas Land. Situated at Drayton Manor Park in Staffordshire, it's easy to get to - near Tamworth, on the A4091, close to Junction 9 of the M42.

Take your Disability Living Allowance letter with you and go straight to guest services for an exit pass that will allow you on all the rides without queuing. If you have any queries call guest services beforehand on 0844 472 1950.

You can take a choo-choo journey on Thomas, or thrill-seekers will enjoy Cranky's drop tower. There's also a super fun Troublesome Trucks Runaway Coaster and you can ride up high on Harold's Heli Tours, Jeremy's Flying Academy or on Bertie the Bus. What's great is that adults can go on most of the rides with the youngsters. For more information look up www.thomasland.co.uk or call the ticket hotline on 0844 472 1960.

Yup, we've done it again...check out our competition to win family tickets to Thomas Land at Drayton Manor Park at the bottom of the next page!



The London Eye



This major attraction offers a special discounted rate to disabled guests booking through the disabled booking line. An accompanying carer will receive a free ticket for the same 'flight'. Discounted rates vary for adults, children and the under-fives, so be sure to state the age of the person applying for the special rate. Tel: 0870 990 8885 or book online.

One NAS member reported: 'As parents of an autistic child, we are full of praise for the way staff go out of their way to help disabled visitors. Our son is non-verbal and cannot tolerate long queues. When we explained the situation to staff, they quickly and efficiently led us to the head of the queue. This meant that we were all able to relax and thoroughly enjoy ourselves.'

The gift store is efficiently run even when busy and has plenty of London Eye-themed toys that will appeal.



Thames Valley Adventure Playground

MAIDENHEAD, BERKSHIRE



Since 1982, this adapted playground has provided a chance for kids with special needs to enjoy fun and freedom in a safe and stimulating environment. It has wheelchair-accessible roundabouts and swings, elevated walkways allowing a child with profound and multiple problems to enjoy the excitement of 'climbing' trees and bucket seats with safety harnesses to enable them to safely experience the thrill of whizzing down a zip wire. Multi-sensory rooms, soft play and crafts indoors add to the fun.

Although AuKids hasn't visited it yet, those who run the playground tell us that it's highly popular with families who have children with autism - out of more than 13,500 visitors last year, they reckon more than half were on the autism spectrum.

Parents also seem to feel that it's the perfect place for little visitors with special needs. "Our child's needs are often not apparent to others and the expectation on him socially is often far higher than he can cope with," said one mum. "This often results in high anxiety, behavioural and emotional outbursts - and a very stressed child and parents. The playground allows us to enjoy being together, without the pressures the outside world can often bring."

To find out more, look up www.tvap.co.uk or call 01628 628 599.

North Staffs Special Adventure Playground



NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME, STAFFORDSHIRE



This adventure playground has it all - safe and enclosed indoor and outdoor play, with plenty of opportunities for kids to get involved with craft activities if they fancy. Outside, the equipment is super - a large hammock swing to lie in, adapted upright swings, a roundabout with flat surface to sit on, a giant hamster-wheel that Debs' twins loved, a sandpit with diggers, climbing frame, aerial runway and adapted bikes to ride. It's all so accessible! There's even a small sensory garden.

As well as respite evenings and holiday play schemes, family sessions run every Saturday and during the holidays. Always contact the playground beforehand as session times vary.

Call 01782 717612 or look up www.specialadventureplayground.co.uk

The Space Centre

PRESTON, LANCASHIRE



AuKids highly recommends SPACE, a wonderful multi-sensory centre. The large, soft padded room is located on two levels connected by stairs and a slide. Whether your child likes to bounce around or just chill out, there is plenty to see, touch and experience! As well as regular weekly family sessions at the weekend, the place can be booked out for groups and birthday parties. Staff are very welcoming and friendly. For those who may be travelling in from afar, you can combine a trip to SPACE with a visit to the nearby steam train and pop into McDonald's on the way!



Sessions take a maximum of ten children and you need to book in advance. For details www.space-centre.org.uk or phone them on 01772 760403.

Chester Zoo - it is a BIG place

UPTON-ON-CHESTER, CHESTER



I remember going to Chester Zoo when I was five or six (which is not that long ago - thank you very much) and marvelling at this other world you normally only got to see on David Attenborough programmes. Having taken Mark earlier this year, it was brilliant to see that the same wonder can still be conjured up today.



The zoo is a big place, arrive early (they open at 10) this means you avoid the queues and you can have a look around before it gets too busy. Pace yourself, or rather let them set the pace - there is an awful lot to do - not just animals but adventure playgrounds, the monorail, decent places to eat and Mark's favourite, the little boat trip.

Unfortunately, unless you go on one of their 'Sensory Days' there are no free passes for carers, but there is plenty of Blue Badge parking and the staff are very receptive and willing to help.

We went on a sunny Saturday which was also a 'Members Day' and so the place was very busy - if it gets a bit overwhelming, head off to the far paddocks where you will always find somewhere calm, as the site is that big.

Before you go have a look at the website (www.chesterzoo.org) and see what is new - an anteatr is due in this summer - they had two baby orang-utans when we arrived and there is nothing like a little bundle of red hair falling over to make you laugh.

Rick Schofield, *parent*.

Southport Model Railway Village

SOUTHPORT, MERSEYSIDE



What a DREAM for anyone with a child on the spectrum who loves trains! Situated inside Kings Gardens at the Promenade in Southport, it is great value - just £12 for a family ticket (two adults, two children) or £3.50 an adult, £3 a child. What we really liked was that every miniature building is lovingly tended to in the minutest detail.



SMALL WORLD: The Bobster pretending he's Gulliver at the Mini Railway.

Our kids were given a little quiz to answer as they strolled around, which helped them pause and take in the detail. Well, it helped Bobby to pause anyway, Alec was just interested in watching the trains go through the tunnels and eating his substantial picnic lunch on one of the many perfectly placed benches around the track.

Once you've finished with the model railway village, there's plenty to keep you busy in this part of

Southport, including a mini train ride that takes you along the Promenade, and another miniature train ride near to the fun fair. For more information contact 01704 538001 or look up www.southportmodelrailwayvillage.co.uk where you can see a passenger's eye view of the journey taken from inside the miniature train - now how cute is that?!

Eureka! THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MUSEUM, HALIFAX, WEST YORKSHIRE

Ah, the relief at visiting a museum where kids are not only free to touch everything they like, but positively encouraged to!

Eureka! has been designed to inspire children to find out about themselves through hundreds of hands-on exhibits. There are six galleries: Desert Discovery is a special habitat for under-fives to explore; Living and Working Together is a small world for small people, where kids can become cashiers, postal workers and mechanics. Or they can try being a grown-up for the day, write their own cheques and go shopping with them. There's even a mini Marks and Spencer.



BY GUM! Debby's son Bobby tries to work out whose mouth is the biggest...

The Me & My Body gallery provides an opportunity for children to learn about themselves and how their bodies work (for Bobby, it was particularly fascinating to discover what might be lurking up that giant nose...) and at the Sound Garden, visitors become miniature so that they can enjoy the full sensory experience of nature in a giant-sized habitat.

Even the glass lifts were enough to amuse one little boy with autism for his entire visit!

Carers get in free, and your entrance ticket can be turned into an annual pass this year. Look up www.eureka.org.uk for details.

After visiting, Bobby came up with a customary classic: 'When can we visit Myreka again?'

Jennie Fielden, *Babysitter for Time Babysitting Ltd.*



NOW THAT'S TASTE: Bobby can't wait for THIS tongue to blow a raspberry...



Mr Clown's Fun Zone

HADFIELD (NEAR GLOSSOP), DERBYSHIRE



Just outside Glossop, very close to Tameside and less than half an hour from Stockport and Buxton is Mr Clown's Fun Zone. This giant soft play centre features an exciting adventure area with giant slides and a winding chute, two quieter sections for under fives to play in, a pretend kitchen, coin-operated rides and party rooms.

But perhaps Mr Clown's biggest triumph is its brand new sensory suite, designed for special needs. The sensory suite's dark room has infra-red wands, a bubble tube, twinkling fibre-optic carpet, mirrors and a range of tactile toys, perfect for stimulating the senses.

The suite's second room has colourful images projected onto its white walls, fibre optic 'spaghetti' for tactile play and a range of other sensory delights. The feel of the rooms is restful and relaxed, with calming music floating overhead and soft beanbags scattering the floors beneath.



There are pre-bookable sensory sessions every Tuesday and Thursday at £5 per child plus drop-in sessions on Saturday and Sundays at £6 per child. Call 01457 865650. The centre holds special needs birthday parties and offers exclusive hire for groups. Loyal readers will know that we often rave about Mr Clown's, which is just the sort of place that every area should have.

Look up www.mrclovnfunzone.com or www.sensorysuite.com for more details.



Drusillas Park

ALFRISTON, EAST SUSSEX

This has a Thomas and Friends visitor attraction, which takes children on a magical ride through landscaped gardens featuring the familiar faces and places in Sodor, Thomas the Tank Engine's home. The park also has a zoo and pet area, and Playland, which is packed with slides, swings, ropes and play equipment.



WIN Family Tickets to THOMAS LAND at Drayton Manor Park!

AUKIDS has a set of family tickets to give away to two lucky winners of our competition. All you have to do is ask your child if they can spot where Thomas is hiding in the pages of AuKids magazine! The first two correct answers will receive family tickets for a great day out! Send your answer on a postcard with your name, address and telephone number to AuKids, PO Box 259, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 9BE or e-mail the answer to aukidsmag@gmail.com no later than August 30th 2010.



FIND THOMAS



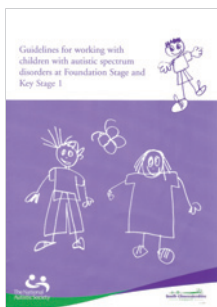
Editor's decision is final. No cash alternative. One entry per person.



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Reviews



BOOK

Guidelines for working with children with autistic spectrum disorders at Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1

By South Gloucestershire Council

2005

Published by the National Autistic Society

£5 available from the NAS website at www.nas.org.uk

ISBN 9781899280643 Code NAS 574

A similar guide is available from the NAS website for Key Stages 3 and 4

This is a book designed to offer practical advice and support for teachers and support staff working with children with ASD*. The document provides useful and straightforward advice on supporting children with ASD to promote inclusion within the classroom and the whole school.

The explanation of ASD is clear and provides an overview for teachers as a starting point for understanding the range of the spectrum and different needs children with ASD may have.

The booklet then goes on to give explanations of where there may be implications for support of the child in social interaction, social communication, flexibility of thought and sensory motor issues with useful examples of the behaviours an ASD child may present in

certain situations and difficulties they may experience in everyday class situations.

The section of the document where the agencies and staff who can support a child with ASD are listed would be particularly useful if a child with an autistic spectrum disorder had not previously attended the school.

A very useful resource for teachers and support workers working with ASD children in the classroom and whole school setting.

Emma Jarrod,

Year 1 teacher Outwood Primary School,
Stockport, Cheshire (mainstream).

*ASD - Autism Spectrum Disorder. AuKids prefers to use the term ASC - Autism Spectrum Condition, as it seems to have less negative associations than the word 'disorder', but both mean the same.



NEW ATTRACTION

Legoland® Discovery Centre

Barton Square, Trafford Centre,
Manchester M17 8AS.

Tickets: 0871 222 2662

LEGO QUEST: Debby with Alec and Gavin with Bobby (and his sound muffers!) on the Kingdom Quest ride. We're probably taking a shoot up involving evil Lego® characters slightly too seriously...

We didn't put this new attraction in our summer places to go feature, although we wanted to. Frankly, though, this isn't the most autism-friendly attraction in the known universe, although we've heard great things about Legoland® Windsor, and hopefully over time this will follow suit.

At the moment the Manchester Legoland® Discovery Centre is somewhat a victim of its own popularity - it's a smallish place for the amount of activities on offer and was heaving when we visited. Its popularity wouldn't be a problem if more floor space was available.

The world and his brother want to know what the new Legoland® looks like, so DO book in advance. Carers get in free if you show proof of disability, saving the standard adult entrance fee of £13.95, but there is currently no online option for this; book over the phone instead on 0871 222 2662.

There is a queue to get in even if you've booked. Alert a member of staff to your child's autism, though, and Merlin assure us that they will be fast-tracked through. Once inside, there's a 'factory tour' for kids, which keeps everyone obliged to stay in one place until the gates open and you're free to explore. When we pointed out that some kids with special needs wouldn't tolerate this, Merlin told us

that staff would accommodate anyone with a disability who wanted an alternative route.

Since it was so busy, the soft play 'fire academy' was too chaotic for our twins. Bobby loved Miniland, which features a host of famous local landmarks in Lego® and lights up when 'night' falls. He also liked the Lego® Racers section where you can build and test run your own vehicles, although you had to elbow your way through some rather sad competitive dads to get a look in.

The exciting Kingdom Quest ride with laser guns to shoot at interactive Lego® scenes was the best fun for Alec - we brought our trusty sound muffer headphones so that Bobby could cope with sudden noises and he loved it, too. The 'Duplo village' was okay, plenty of big bricks to play with, but nothing that you couldn't find elsewhere. There were lots of grumbles around me about the queues, the chaos and the entrance price, but perhaps when it's not such a novelty - and at less popular times - things will calm down a bit (we went on a Saturday afternoon).

Overall, this new attraction would benefit from quieter, calmer special needs sessions. When we told them, Merlin told us they were really keen to pursue this idea. Until then, choose a quiet time to go. Like 2am...

Debby Elley



BOOK

Not Stupid

By Anna Kennedy

2009

Published by John Blake
Publishing

£7.99

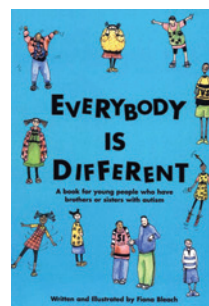
ISBN 9781844547845

A fabulous true story of how with determination and your own children as an incentive, even the 'impossible' is achievable! After years of battling to get her two young boys with autism into appropriate schools with no success, along with support from other parents, Anna Kennedy decided to set up her own specialist school for children with high-functioning autism.

Months of fundraising and meetings with politicians were followed by television appearances and interviews - all whilst the author was looking after her two sons, Patrick and Angelo, who were being home educated! Not only did Anna set up Hillingdon Manor school, but this same group of supportive parents established a college as well as a residential home for adults.

The school has quickly become an established highly recommended school for children with autism with a fantastic reputation. The book is an inspiring read for anyone struggling to see the light at the end of the tunnel!

Tori Houghton



KID'S
REVIEW

BOOK

Everybody is Different

By Fiona Bleach

2001

Published by the National
Autistic Society

£8.00

ISBN 9781899280339

I found 'Everybody is Different' a clear, useful and understandable guide to experiencing life with an autistic sibling. Having a younger autistic brother (Adam, 8) myself, I thought "Well I know my brother better than anyone else! I know why he sometimes doesn't understand me or why he has tantrums!" But by reading this book, I have found out that I don't.

This book is not about becoming a 'brainiac' when it comes to psychology and how the brain works; it's for anyone who is a friend of an autistic child or a relative who knows them or just someone who wants to learn about the disability.

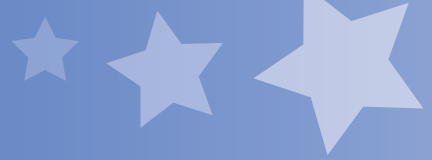
It doesn't say "Your brother or sister has to do this and this and you've got to change them!" It explains you don't have to look after them, sure you can do your bit but it helps to make your life a bit easier. So, when your brother/sister has a tantrum, you know why and you can stay calm.

In all, it has appealing illustrations and is split into chapters so you can go back to a certain bit easily. This is an interesting, good read and I was very surprised and impressed by the book.

Conor Giblin, aged 12.



Send in your reviews of a book or DVD to aukidsmag@gmail.com You can also review items from your child's point of view - older children may like to write their own reviews. No more than 150 words, please.



Time to Stop and Admire the View

By Debby Elley, journalist and mum of twins with autism.

Sometimes I imagine a grown-up Alec, and it's difficult to picture. Our six-year-old son, who has learning difficulties as well as autism, may never sport a pinstripe suit or dash through executive lounges on his way to 'important' meetings. I doubt he'll be 'flying ideas up flagpoles' very much and I'm almost certain that he'll never be the next Richard Branson. Does this make me sad for him? On the contrary, sometimes I think Alec gets the best deal.

using symbols to help him communicate. He's been building up sentences with the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), and it's been so long since I tried sign language with him that I hadn't really considered using it again, that is until Tori suggested it. Alec's fine motor skills have improved considerably over the last year, so I tentatively gave it another shot. Gavin did too, and withheld a Jelly Tot for a fraction longer than was comfortable. Suddenly, Alec's hand shot up to his

“If I only counted mountain summits as a true measure of success, then I'd never have enjoyed those wonderful, awe-inspiring views along the way.”

Alec wakes up every morning with a sunny smile on his face. I'm not sure what makes his day, but I would hazard a guess that it involves biscuits, cake and tickles in roughly equal measures. His connection with the outdoors is rather beautiful - he watches clouds and twiddles dandelions (and yes, he sometimes tries to eat them) and he occasionally (when he's not dashing around) has this gorgeous, serene quality, exuding a tranquillity that is quite catching for those caught up in the neuro-typical whirlwind that we call life.

Recently, when lying in the sun next to Alec as he cheerfully despatched the garden's population of buttercups, I realised how happy he makes me. That's when I'm not busy worrying about other people's values and expectations. He may never be independent, but I'm pretty sure that given the right people around him, he'll always be joyful. Since we only came here to party, I reckon he has the right idea.

Alec is non-verbal, and we've been

face in a 'please' sign. He got the Jelly Tot, and several more!

With reinforcement each day, Alec's version of a Makaton 'please' has become a regular occurrence. Who'd have thought that such a small change could make such a massive difference, though? Alec uses his 'please' sign to mean 'I want' 'Give it to me!' 'More!' 'Yes' 'Please' and 'Thanks' (even though 'please' and 'thanks' are slightly different signs, we're generous with our interpretation).

He even indicated that he didn't want to get off the roundabout at the park by sitting tight and signing 'please'.

We don't know when or even if Alec will ever talk. But Alec's progress, I've found, is like the rest of my life. If I only counted mountain summits as a true measure of success, then I'd never have enjoyed those wonderful, awe-inspiring views along the way.

I won't know what's significant in Alec's life until long after the event. So for now, I'll celebrate each little step as if it were the top of a mountain. Well, for him, it probably is.

I'VE MADE IT



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phone 0161 283 4848

or visit www.togethertrust.org.uk

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Readers' Page



Ebrima Senghore
aged 6

Celebrity Spotlight



Cort Spencer Jones
aged 5½

Diagnosis: Autism Spectrum Condition

School: Medlock Primary School, Manchester.

Likes: Music, dance, eating and being outside.

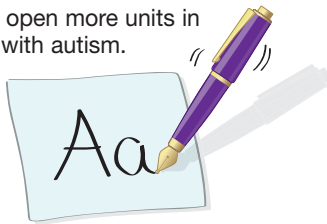
Worst habits: Snoring (!) Not listening sometimes.

Personality in four words: Funny, loving, happy and caring.

Song that best describes me: *Beautiful* by Christina Aguilera.

If I were Prime Minister: I'd open more units in mainstream schools for kids with autism.

Ambition: To be able to communicate more, so people can understand me - and to be able to read and write.



Diagnosis: Cerebral Palsy, brittle asthmatic, autistic.

My family: Mummy, Daddy, two sisters and Bagpuss the cat.

School: Our Lady Of Compassion Primary School in Solihull, West Midlands.

I love: Swimming, the beach, chicken nuggets, Vimto, Thomas the Tank Engine, Yorkshire puddings, my adapted bicycle and swing.

I hate: The majority of food including smelly, funny colour, looks nasty (even when mummy says it's not), eating outside my house as I don't like eating anywhere else, all drinks except Vimto, having injections in my legs, staying in hospital a lot (But I LOVE the ambulances!)

Ambition: To be a train driver and drive Thomas the Tank Engine.



Want your little star to appear on our Celebrity Spotlight page? Send your own answers with a jpeg picture of your child in action to: aukidsmag@gmail.com

P.S.

Back to Basics!

The Basics range for Soft Clothing is now available at the Sensory Smart Store online. All Soft Clothing is tested and approved by kids with sensory sensitivity. They are tag-less with flat seams, wide collars and soft elastic waists. Look up www.sensory-smart.co.uk

Indoor Fun

All Total Fitness gyms have a dedicated area for family fitness where parents can exercise alongside their children - great for active kids who don't like to be shut indoors. There are junior gyms for children aged seven plus and mini gyms for three to seven year-old members. There is also free internet surfing and use of games consoles available for children while visiting Total Fitness gyms. Look up www.totalfitness.co.uk or enquire at your local gym.

It's As Simple As That!

Earn cash for your fave cause - us of course! - whilst doing your usual shopping! At www.simplyfundraising.co.uk you get a free debit card, which works a bit like a telephone top up card. You top it up with your shopping budget and then use it in the same way as an ordinary debit card. Then whenever you spend money at certain stores, AuKids gets a percentage of the cash. Neat, eh? Subscribers - see enclosed letter for more details.

Special Show

Theatre company Oily Cart is touring special schools and nurseries this October and November (and next year in March and April) with its production 'Drum'. Aimed at young people under 11 with profound and multiple learning disabilities or an autism spectrum condition, it uses non-verbal, multi-sensory techniques to engage its audience. A tiny audience of six for each show enables the actors to communicate directly with each individual and tailor the experience to suit them. For more information look up www.oilycart.org.uk or contact administrator Sarah Crompton: oilies@oilycart.org.uk

Lost and Found

We found some cute wrist alarm bands at www.lostmefindme.co.uk to help keep track of your child if they're fond of wandering off. If they wander too far, their wrist band triggers an alarm in the parent's receiver. Parents can also locate their children using the device. Hurrah! No more panic attacks in the supermarket.



Something Special in Print!

The Makaton Charity has been working with Cbeebies Magazines to publish a special edition magazine devoted to the programme Something Special, which is aimed at children with special needs. This hugely colourful magazine includes photos of Justin and Mr Tumble signing and uses Makaton symbols across all the activities. Not only does it come packed with excellent activities to support learning, it also comes with a sheet of stickers and a Mr Tumble doll. This special edition is available from the Makaton website at www.makaton.org for £3.50.