

Christmas
Issue!

Aukids™

Issue 2
Winter 2008
Manchester/Cheshire
Free

Positive parenting for children with ASD

INSIDE:



All Ears

Kids saddle up at donkey sanctuary



Survive Christmas!

Top tips to help your child through the festive season



Secret Santa Shhhhh!

Our top 20 online gifts to take the strain out of shopping



PLUS

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Letter from the Editor

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Welcome to AuKids'
**Christmas
Issue!**



Debby Elley
Editor, AuKids

It's great to be here with you again after a busy summer spent promoting AuKids and sourcing funding for future issues. Firstly, thank you to all of those readers who took the trouble to write to us and tell us what you thought of the magazine. We've been really encouraged by the positive response and we've made a note of all your good ideas – some of them appear in this issue! Please keep sending in your views, we'd love to hear from you.

Tori is unable to be with us this time because of work commitments but we hope to see her back in time for spring.

We know that although Christmas is exciting for most children, for kids with autism the changes that the season brings can be a bit overwhelming. That's why we've joined forces with the National Autistic Society to bring you some good advice on surviving the festive period – see page 5.

Don't forget that the National Autistic Society also runs a parent to parent telephone support line for parents and carers of an adult or child on the autism spectrum. If you need a little extra advice, you can call free from a landline at any time and leave a message. A volunteer will then phone you back. Call 0800 9 520 520 or look up www.nas.org.uk for further details on all NAS support services.

We have several fairy godmothers to thank for our Christmas issue. Firstly, we're really grateful to those nice people at Standard Life Plc, who have agreed to print AuKids for us. This means that we can now distribute to families in Manchester, Stockport and Cheshire, so if you know anyone who would like to see a copy, drop us a line at aukidsmag@googlemail.com or call 0161 436 6643. Alternatively, you can download a copy of the magazine at our website www.aukids.co.uk.

Our second fairy godmother is Catalyst Video Ltd, which has supplied AuKids with a graphic artist for a fraction of the usual professional cost. Catalyst is the animation studio responsible for The Space Place, a fun cartoon series designed for children with autism. Look up www.spaceplace.tv for more information. Pam Lever at Catalyst has also designed some colouring fun for your little one – see our back page.

Our final fairy godmother is photographer Vicky McAffer who took our cover shot of Bobby Elley, age 4, riding a donkey at EST donkey sanctuary near Gorton in East Manchester. See page 4 for the full story.

As it's the season to be jolly, we've got some great treats for AuKids readers. Ki Day Spa in Altrincham is the perfect place for our busy parents to enjoy a spot of respite during the hectic run-up to Christmas – see page 11 for a great reader offer. Plus, not only are the Novelty Warehouse offering us their best stocking filler ideas for children with autism, they're even giving some of them away! See page 9.

Thanks to our advertisers for supporting this issue. Rest assured that we only promote those resources that we'd truly recommend to a friend. If you'd like to advertise with us, please contact the team at aukidsmag@googlemail.com.

Whatever you're celebrating, we hope you have a wonderful winter holiday.

Happy Christmas!

Debby Elley
Editor, AuKids
www.aukids.co.uk

NAS report sets new standards for the North West



During the summer, representatives from the National Autistic Society interviewed parents across the North West in order to produce a report on their experiences of diagnosis. Recommendations from this report will be used to compile a regional set of standards that encompass best practice for the identification and diagnosis of ASDs in childhood.

Recommendations included training early years and education professionals to understand the

alerting signs that might indicate ASD in a child. Detailed proposals were also put forward concerning better support for parents both at the time of assessment and post-diagnosis. Better multi-agency support was also recommended as a way of offering parents a network of consistent support.

If you'd like to read about the findings in detail, you can request a copy of the full report - *Parents' Experience of Diagnosis Across the North West* - by writing to debbie.waters@nas.org.uk.

You Asked For Help? You Got It!



The National Autistic Society's Help! programme of seminars continues in Stockport on February 10th 2009 at the Alma Lodge Hotel on Buxton Road. The Help! family support programme provides information, support and advice for

parents/carers, family members and people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder. This one-day programme is free and is for parents/carers whose child is between 3 and 12 years old and has had a recent diagnosis (within last 18 months) of ASD.

The programme provides basic information on Autism Spectrum Disorders, education, communication strategies, services and benefits. During this free event, participants receive a useful Help! pack. Lunch, tea and coffee are all included. Two family members can attend (or one family member and a friend). Places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis. Call Help! programme administrator Clare Naylor on 0161 946 1193 to book your place.

A Hands On Approach



The 5th Annual 'Autism a Hands On Approach' conference, held on the 5th of

November this year proved to be another excellent day. With a fascinating line up of speakers the day was chaired, as in previous years, by journalist and

parent Charlotte Moore. Next year's conference will be held on **Wednesday 11th November 2009** at Pinewood Education Centre, Stepping Hill Hospital, Stockport. For further information or to be put on the mailing list call Tanya Farley on 07966 399 709.

Moved to Mainstream?

Independent Options, a Stockport organisation promoting inclusion for all children with disabilities, is planning drop-in sessions for parents whose children attended an inclusive nursery in Stockport this year and moved onto mainstream primary school settings in September 2008.

The idea is to have regular coffee mornings or afternoons to discuss and tackle transition issues and to exchange ideas on good practice. It is thought this will involve families whose children attended Valley and Charnwood nurseries, but details are still being finalised. For more information, contact Inclusion Facilitator Karen Heywood on 0161 482 2535 or e-mail kheywood@independentoptions.org.uk

Christmas at The Pines



The children's centre run by Independent Options at The Pines, 67 Chester Road, Hazel Grove (near the railway bridge) is throwing a Christmas party for young children with special needs on December 22nd from 1.30pm-3.30pm. Entrance is free but you need to book in advance by contacting either Karen or Jacqui on 0161 482 2535 or e-mail kheywood@independentoptions.org.uk

As part of its holiday club, The Pines is also running a free playgroup on December 29 from 1.30pm-3.30pm with arts, crafts and lots of other fun activities. Booking is essential. The Pines runs regular play sessions and holiday clubs, so it's worth being added to their mailing list.

contact a family for families with disabled children

Contact A Family is a great source of information and support for all families who have a child with any disability. As well as helplines they produce information leaflets, run courses and workshops and organise really accessible, inclusive and enjoyable free events. Their free helpline is 0808 808 3555 or you can e-mail helpline@cafamily.org.uk. The website is www.cafamily.org.uk

Parent to Parent



One of our readers has recommended The Talbot House Support Centre, open Monday to Friday 10am-3pm. It is run by parents and is for parents of children and adults with learning disabilities. It is based at Monsall Street, Harpurhey, Manchester M40 8QF. For details call 0161 203 4095.



Mini Reporters Ride High at Donkey Sanctuary

Earlier this year, as our speech therapist friend Tori Houghton rode across narrow ridges along the Valley of the Kings on a donkey, she said that she couldn't help but feel relaxed, confident and peaceful. There is a misconception that these animals are stupid and stubborn – or just plain depressed, according to Winnie the Pooh - but as her donkey expertly manoeuvred along rocky ridges, she reported feeling something magical and intelligent about her four-legged friend.

We realised that this may be why donkeys have a particular affinity with children with special needs, who can enjoy free donkey rides at the Elizabeth Svendsen Trust near Gorton in East Manchester. EST Manchester is home to about 20 rescue donkeys and 60 staff, most of whom are volunteers. Annually, it costs £220,000 to run this charitable centre, which relies entirely on donations.

Manager Debbie Coombes says she has seen children relax, gain confidence and even say their first word after a donkey ride. So we invited an intrepid team of mini AuKids reporters to see what they thought.



Beanbag Beret

The latest look, thinks Sam

It's Sam's first time and he can hardly contain his excitement, so much so that waiting isn't part of his agenda. Very soon, though, he is being led by an instructor and volunteer who is soon wearing a beanbag on her head – thanks Sam!

SAM'S VERDICT: WATCHES DAD'S MOBILE PHONE FOOTAGE OF HIS DONKEY RIDE ALL THE WAY HOME.



Bullseye!

Bobby shoots...and he scores!

Amongst our reporters are Debby's twins Bobby and Alec, who have been before, know the drill and are really relaxed. Riding the donkeys is all about gaining confidence physically as well as opportunities to follow simple instructions - check out Bobby throwing beanbags.

BOBBY'S VERDICT: 'I WUV DONKEYS!'




Lizzie Gets Busy


You Go Girl!


Lizzie is slightly more nervous. It's a new experience for her and the sights, smells and sounds prove a bit overwhelming. So Lizzie takes some time out to eat biscuits in the large café and play area. Eventually, she watches her brother Sam on a donkey and with a little expert encouragement from experienced volunteers, she's on a donkey before she knows it. Although unsure at first, she soon settles into it and by the end of the ride we have a job persuading her to get off!


LIZZIE'S VERDICT: BEAMING ALL THE WAY HOME.

 The Saturday club for children with special needs and their siblings takes place on the 3rd Saturday of the month.

 You need to phone and book a place - 0161 301 4051.

 Drop in Twilight sessions take place on Wednesday afternoons from 3.15 to 4.45pm on a first come, first served basis.

 The centre has additional sessions throughout the school holidays - phone the centre to find out and book - they get full up early.

 For schools, the centre has a rotational slot on a Friday afternoon - phone to find out more.

 For more details check out www.elizabethsvendsentrust.org.uk or call 0161 301 4051.

With thanks to our photographer Vicky McAffer.



How to Find Us: EST Manchester is situated at the bottom of Green Fold, off Abbey Hey Lane at the Northern entrance to Debdale Park (there is no vehicle access from the Hyde Road entrance to the park). From the M60 take junction 23 and follow the A635 (Ashton Old Road) towards Manchester. Continue for 1.5 miles passing St Anne's Catholic Church on the right hand side. After a further 1/2 mile take a left turn opposite St Clement's Church into Capital Road. Take the 3rd left (immediately after bridge by corner shop) into Abbey Hey Lane. A short way past the Hamlet Public House take the left turn into Green Fold. The centre is straight ahead over the bridge and to the right.

Surviving Christmas the ASD Way!

Tips

A time for joy, a time for giving...and a time for routines to be turned upside down.

Here are some great ideas to help your child negotiate the festive season without too much stress. With thanks to the National Autistic Society.

Give plenty of warning – highlight the holiday period on the household or child's calendar.

Include on your calendar dates when friends or relatives come to stay.

Mark the days that you will buy and put up the Christmas tree and decorations, as well as any other changes.

Indicate on the calendar when school term ends and starts again, call it 'Christmas time' and talk about being at home. It's the same for any religious festival – talk about it in advance.

Visual timetables are most important during this period – keep using them.

Include your child with the shopping, so that they can see decorations before they are brought out.

Involve your child with hanging up Christmas decorations, even if they are just in the room when they are put up. This will hopefully prevent a negative reaction to new items being placed in a familiar environment.

For some children with ASD, too many presents can be overwhelming. One or two gifts a day could reduce anxiety.

For good advice on buying toys for kids with ASD look up www.insidethebubble.co.uk/toys.php

Decorate the house over a period of time if your child finds the changes difficult. Put the tree in position and leave it for a few days before you start to decorate it.

Ask the Panel

“My son has a very restricted diet and is reluctant to try new foods. Why is he so fussy and how can I help him to try new things?”

THE DEBATE:

Faddy diets are a common feature of autism and a potential source of anxiety among parents and carers. How can parents vary the limited menu a child will tolerate? We put this common query to our panel of experts.

Mind you, we wouldn't much fancy this either!



Clare Jones BA(Hons) Dip ION mBANT

Clare is a Nutritional Therapist based in Manchester.

Nutritional Therapy Council Registered Practitioner.

Contact her on 07985 166606 or e-mail info@clarejones-nutrition.co.uk

Autistic children very often restrict the number of foods they eat and find it hard to make changes to their diet. A number of possible factors may be involved:

- a heightened sense of taste and smell, making some foods unpalatable
- a dislike of the texture of some food or the temperature at which it is served
- if digestive problems or food allergies are an issue, your son may fear an unfamiliar food may give him tummy-ache or other unpleasant symptoms

If you want to encourage your son to try new foods, start by making sure that the foods you want to introduce are not likely to contribute to any allergic reactions: this is a complicated area so it is advisable to get professional help with it. Any changes should be introduced slowly: only one new food at a time and don't lose heart if it is rejected at first.



Julia Dyer MCSP BSc(Hons)

Julia is an independent physiotherapist and advanced sensory integration practitioner based in Clitheroe, Lancashire.

For details look up www.juliadyer.com or call 07752 365 487

Many children with autism have problems processing sensory information and this may be contributing to your son's restricted diet. Fussy eaters with sensory based feeding problems restrict their diet as a result of their difficulties with processing sensory information. For example, a child who is over responsive to touch may not like the feel of a spoon in their mouth or the texture of food. Children may be over responsive to the smell of food or the taste of food or they may be under responsive in certain sensory systems. These sensory problems can then lead to the child having a very restricted diet.

The first step in forming strategies is to discover if this is a sensory based feeding problem and then to identify the sensory systems involved. Sensory strategies can then be put in place to address the sensory issues. For example, I have been working recently with a young boy who was over responsive to tactile input and his diet was restricted to three dry foods (toast, crisps, crackers). By addressing the sensory problem, through therapy and a sensory diet at home, he is now extending the types of food he will eat.

“I had a big problem with food. I liked to eat things that were bland and uncomplicated. My favourite foods were cereal – dry with no milk. Because these were the foods I ate early in life, I found them comforting and soothing. I didn't want to try anything new.”

Sean Barron, an adult with autism.



Luke Beardon

Luke is a Senior Lecturer in Autism at The Autism Centre, Sheffield Hallam University

Contact him at l.beardon@shu.ac.uk

“Crunchy foods such as potato chips may sound like a raging forest fire to children with sensitive hearing.”

Temple Grandin, an adult with autism.

There are two main possibilities here (possibly both) that may be at play: a powerful inherent (and logical) drive not to steer away from the familiar and sensory hyper and/or hypo sensitivities. In the first instance it is often best to go for an extremely gradual exposure to new experiences taken at a pace suited to the individual. One additional pea a week is fine! And one pea followed by nine mouthfuls of a favourite foodstuff is better than no peas at all. Golden rules – eating is necessary to survive, but a restricted diet is not the end of the world – it’s a balance between potential distress (mental health) and the perfect diet (physical health). The former is just as important as the latter, if not more so.

Sensory issues are about perceptual reality. Just because you can’t taste colours, for example, it doesn’t mean someone else can’t. Check out literature on synaesthesia* for more info. Also think about whether food is touching other food, what shape it is, what texture it is, what temperature it is – most people assume it’s all about taste, but think of all the other senses as well.

And, the bottom line – if you find food that is accepted, great – it doesn’t matter if the range is nowhere near as much as other people’s. Sometimes, variety sucks.



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



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.

“I found cooked vegetables unpleasant on my tongue and the roof of my mouth. Sometimes I felt like the food was choking me.”

Wendy Lawson, an adult with Asperger Syndrome, quote from Life Behind Glass.

It’s really important that your child associates mealtimes as pleasant and relaxed experiences.

It may be reassuring to hear that on many occasions I have been surprised to hear that children manage to take in enough essential nutrients despite having a restricted diet, but this is something that should be explored with a trained professional, like a paediatrician or dietician. Your GP is the best person to see in the first instance.

Assuming that there are no medical or physical causes for your child’s restricted diet, in my clinical experience there are a number of commonly occurring explanations for restricted diets in children who have autism - sensory issues, dislike of change or increased attention to detail.

It might be helpful to make a list of all of the foods your child will eat happily and then have a think about any similarities between them, like whether they are similar in colour, texture, smell and whether your child has a preference for hot or cold food, to using cutlery or his hands to eat, or to one particular method of cooking.

Mealtime diaries can be excellent ways to spot trends in your child’s existing eating habits. Make a note of the date, day and time your child ate; where he ate and whether anyone else was there; what the environment was like; how the food was presented; what they ate and how much.

Try hard not to get stressed and do not punish your child for not eating what you offer! Your approach and attitude to mealtimes can have a huge impact on your child’s inclination to try new foods. It’s really important that your child associates

mealtimes as pleasant and relaxed experiences.

Children are more likely to try something new if it’s familiar to them. It’s important that he sees others handling and eating that food. You might start by shopping for the food with your child, showing it to them and naming it on a few occasions. You could then involve him in preparing meals with you. Then you could serve it up for family members to eat and when someone does eat it, praise them for doing so.

Try to make sure that the ‘conditions’ around mealtime (e.g. using preferred cutlery, preferred background noise etc.) are right for your child before introducing him to something new. Your diary entries should help you to do this.

If you suspect that the appearance or presentation of food is very important to your son, always keep this in mind.

Gradually introducing your child to a new food is another option. You could start by just having a small piece of food on the table and when he is able to tolerate this, move the food a little closer to your son’s plate. Then you could try putting a small piece on his plate without asking him to do anything with it. If he manages to do this for a number of days, ask him to touch it, then to smell it, then to put it to his lips etc.

Reward charts can motivate your child to try new things, provided they are able to understand their purpose. Targets should be worded in a positive way and be short and to the point e.g. to keep a little bit of carrot on your plate. The reward should be given as soon as the child achieves the target. This way they know exactly what it is that they have done that was so great and are more likely to do it again.



FURTHER INFORMATION

The National Autistic Society Helpline can provide information sheets on a variety of food-related topics, including restricted diets.

Call 0845 070 4004 or look up www.nas.org.uk for details.

FURTHER READING

Just take a bite! Easy effective answers to food aversions and eating challenges.

Author: Lori Emmsperger and Tania Stegen-Hanson

£15.95 excl. vat, available through the NAS website at www.nas.org.uk



*Synaesthesia could be described as a joining of two or more of the senses. For instance, experiencing colours when hearing or seeing letters or numbers.





Do I Really Need to Go Potty?

TOILET training a child with autism can be a bit of a challenge. But Anna Turner, continence specialist nurse for children in Stockport, believes that most kids can achieve continence if given the opportunity and the right support. Here she provides AuKids with some useful pointers for those patient parents who are ready to face the big push ...



Can I train my child to use the potty before he can speak?

Yes. Even if your child has very limited communication, they still have the potential to use the potty. It sometimes means that prompted toileting has to continue for a couple of years, but most children eventually work out when their body is telling them to use the toilet and how to get someone to understand that that is what they want.

I want to train my child, but I can't stand the thought of all the mess.

The basic principles of toilet training are the same for any child; parents with children who have autism sometimes need to be a bit more creative. Since kids with autism can be quite literal, it's sometimes a good idea to show them how to use the toilet yourself. You should also be aware of any sensory obstacles they may experience - the flushing sound may

bother a child with sensitive hearing, for instance. Get them comfortable with sitting on a potty or toilet, with a small toilet seat and a stool to put their feet on. Work out how often your child is weeing by putting a piece of kitchen roll in your child's nappy and checking it every hour. If they are wet every time you check, it probably means your child's bladder needs to mature a bit more before you start toilet training.

Then set your self a time limit of at least 2–3 weeks where potty training is going to be the focus. Take your child out of nappies – if you don't want to do this, try underpants under the nappy – so that the child feels wet. Get in plenty of underpants and leggings or joggers. Try not to make a fuss about wet stuff, and praise any steps in the right direction.

What do I do if my child gets too big for supermarket nappies?

Promocon can provide details of which companies supply larger nappies. If your child is 4 years old with learning disabilities then you may be entitled to free nappies on the Home Delivery Service from your Primary Care Trust. Your health visitor will be able to request them.

When should I ask for help from the continence nurse?

If you feel that progress is not being made, then your health visitor can refer your child to the continence nurse, who will see if there are any areas that need to be worked on and provide other ideas. She will also assess whether there are any underlying reasons your child is not achieving continence.

If there is no continence nurse for children in your area it would be worth contacting the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), or the complaints department for the PCT.

Further Information



Washable pants have padding and are great for that in-between stage. Buy them from P&S Healthcare on **0115 968 1188** or www.pshealthcare.co.uk



Promocon is a charity that promotes continence. You can buy washable pants from them, and they also have a helpline – **0161 834 2001**, open Monday-Friday 10am-3pm. Look up www.promocon.co.uk.



Good books include *Toilet Training for Individuals with Autism or Other Developmental Issues* by Carol Stock Kranowitz and Maria Wheeler (Paperback - Sep 2007) and *Toilet Training for Individuals with Autism & Related Disorders: A Comprehensive Guide for Parents & Teachers* by Maria Wheeler (Paperback - 1 Mar 1999).



If you have any concerns about your child's continence, contact your health visitor or GP in the first instance.

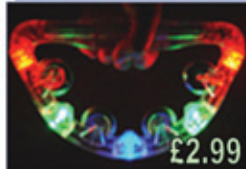
Top 20 Christmas Stocking Fillers for Kids with Autism

STUCK FOR STOCKING FILLERS?

It's not too late to pick up some fabulous Christmas gifts, and with a helping hand from AuKids and The Novelty Warehouse.com you won't be stuck for inspiration this year. Check out our Top 20 ideas for kids on the autism spectrum, brought to you by The Novelty Warehouse... for extraordinary multi-sensory resources, toys and novelties



1. Flashing Tambourine



£2.99

Lights, music & noise - ideal ingredients for fun sensory play

2. Flashing Maracas



£1.35

Dancing lights & rewarding sounds - highly popular & multi-sensory

3. Galaxy Wand Spinner



£2.45

Spinning light effects, calming visual input - encourages focus & concentration

4. Flashing Pompoms



£4.99

Flashing, twirling, lights & sounds encourages interaction & expression

5. Light Up DNA Bead Ball



£2.99

Sensory squeeze stress ball - rewarding tactile play

6. Flashing Meteoric Ball



£1.25

Multi-sensory textured ball - very appealing to children with ASD

7. Singing Glo Tube



£1.95

Multi-talented resource - encourages use of imagination, speech & motor skills

8. Feather Bracelet



£2.49

Light up, soft and tactile rewarding visual effect

9. Astro Spinner Necklace



£1.99

Spinning light effects, great visual interest - can have a calming effect for many children

10. Yoyo Jellyfish



£1.95

Satisfying soothing action - highly pliable light up character

11. Voice Changer



£9.99

Promotes speech, language & communication - offers fantastic sounds reward

12. 3 Ball Spinner



£3.99

Mesmerising lights & spinning effect - fantastic visual reward

13. Space Blanket



£2.55

Shiny, crinkly & tactile - offers so many sensory play possibilities

14. Wild Dancing Ball



£5.99

Crazy dancing ball of lights and music - great fun!

15. UV Touchabubbles



£2.75

Bubbles that can be touched - amazing multi-sensory fun for all ages

16. Weighted Sand Animal



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INFLATABLE fun - encourages interaction, motor skills & tracking

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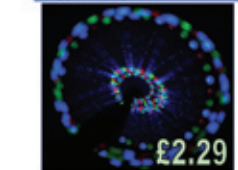
19. Horror squeeze Heads



£2.39

Gruesome, tactile squeeze & stretch - always very popular!

20. Light Up Rattle Baton



£2.29

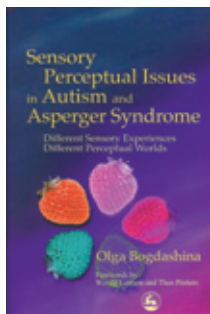
Noisy rattle with fantastic light effects - rewarding motor skills workout

Order now online at: www.thenoveltywarehouse.com

Competition: AuKids has five Flashing Tambourines to give away to five lucky readers. To be in with a chance of winning, just answer this question: What is the name of The Novelty Warehouse's little green dinosaur logo? Visit our website to find the answer at: www.thenoveltywarehouse.com Send your answers to auidis:mag@googlemail.com no later than December 31st 2008. Only one entry per person. Good luck and happy shopping!



Reviews



BOOK

Sensory Perceptual Issues in Autism and Asperger Syndrome

Published by Jessica Kingsley

Available from all good bookshops

£14.20 from Amazon (www.amazon.co.uk)

How to Make Sense of Integration Issues

You can read scientific books on autism until the cows come home. Although you may be wiser, you're not necessarily any further forward in terms of helping your child. Meanwhile, you've got quite a few Friesians queuing at the front door.

I've sensed for a long time that my autistic son Alec has sensory integration issues, but haven't known where to turn for help. Most of what's written on autism focuses on the triad of impairments as central to the condition –

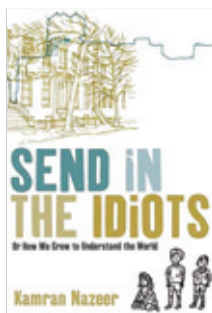
communication, social interaction and imagination, rather than the basic sensory issues that can influence the triad itself.

At last, I discovered Olga Bogdashina after she featured as one of the key note speakers at Stockport's Hands On autism conference in 2007. A visiting lecturer at Birmingham University, she has a particular interest in sensory perceptual and communication problems in autism.

What's great about her 2003 book *Sensory Perceptual Issues in Autism and Asperger Syndrome* is that as well as summing up the physiology of sensory problems, she helps parents and professionals to decipher the exact nature of perceptual difficulties through observing a child's behaviour. She backs up her own observations with testimonies from adults with autism spectrum disorders. Then she offers a brief tour of treatments available before supplying the reader with a detailed sensory profile checklist.

This is practical, helpful, clear and concise. If you suspect sensory issues are a factor in your child's condition, I'd recommend a read.

Debby Elley



BOOK

Send in the Idiots by Kamran Nazeer

Available from all good bookstores

Price £8.44

Life on the Inside

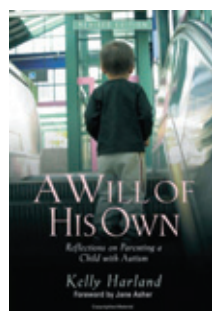
Probably the most inspiring aspect of Kamran Nazeer's *Send in the Idiots* is its author. Nazeer, who grew up in New York, was diagnosed with autism as a toddler and received superlative early intervention from the only class in one of the only schools in NY that had a specialist programme for children with autism.

Twenty-three years later, and now an immensely articulate policy advisor at Whitehall, Nazeer himself is testament to pioneering work in the States that emerged at a time when public awareness of autism was virtually non-existent.

In writing this book, Nazeer decided to reflect on the disparate paths of his schoolmates and to find out what had become of them. The result is a series of chapters that read rather like a Louis Theroux documentary, with the author staying in the homes of his ex-classmates in order to report with fly-on-the-wall accuracy.

His observations provide detailed and thorough insights into the hugely variable effects of being on the spectrum. The result is a full and vivid explanation of what it means to be autistic from the perspective of someone who truly knows what they're talking about, with plenty of technical information to beef up the author's commentary.

Debby Elley



BOOK

A Will of His Own – Reflections on Parenting a Child with Autism

by Kelly Harland

Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers

£12.99

A Mother's Journey

This emotional, warm, interesting and easy to read book will appeal to professionals and parents alike.

Harland clarifies and highlights key points in her journey so far with anecdotes and stories which really help the reader to empathise with her. This is not another miracle story of a child who is cured of autism, this is the real

life account of the journey this mother is experiencing.

She describes key moments in Will's life with honesty and emotion. Her understanding of her son and his difficulties and her sensitive approach in helping and protecting him really shines through. She displays an overwhelming sense of love for Will amidst all the challenges, worries and fears.

Harland describes people she has felt honoured to have met along the way which no doubt she attracts through her acceptance and positive attitude.

The book reads more like a series of individual chapters rather than a chronological story of Will's life so far and this can be a little confusing.

Although it doesn't offer anything new in dealing with autism, it does bravely address many of the issues parents have to deal with and Harland's clever use of analogies will help professionals to really understand the parent's perspective.

Tori Houghton



DVD

Makaton Nursery Rhymes

Available from most major DVD outlets

Currently £6.98 from www.amazon.co.uk - down from £9.99

Dave Goes Back to Bassists with Makaton Funk

Ditch the traditional nursery rhyme DVDs that drive you slowly berserk. Watch something that both you and your child can enjoy – Makaton Nursery Rhymes presented by the irrepressible Dave Benson Phillips.

Oh, the relief at not having to sit through some prim school-mistress singing Hey Diddle Diddle in a dialect only favoured by the Queen and Prince Philip. Dave, backed by the sort of funky bass that would have made Chic's Bernard Edwards proud, struts his way through well-trodden paths, giving age-old ditties a contemporary twist whilst signing Makaton with beautiful clarity.

Old Macdonald, Baa Baa Black Sheep and Hickory Dickory Dock are among the many rhymes receiving a much-needed makeover. This DVD was recommended to me during a Makaton workshop and it's been a raging success with my twins, who are both on the autistic spectrum.

WARNING: You'll find yourself rapping along to Goldilocks and The Three Bears at inconvenient moments.

Debby Elley



DVD

Snow Cake

Available from most major DVD outlets

Price £4.98 from www.amazon.co.uk

Sigourney Weaves Some Winter Magic

Writer Angela Pell's heart-warming screenplay, *Snow Cake* (15), is a delicate and sympathetic portrayal of autism. The fate of ex-convict Alex Hughes (Alan Rickman) is changed forever after his buoyant teenage hitchhiker (Emily Hampshire) is killed in a horrific collision. Unscathed, Hughes sets off to find the victim's mother, expecting to be greeted by hysterical grief.

Instead, he meets Lynda (Sigourney Weaver), whose autism means that she's unable to register her daughter's death on a 'neuro-typical' plane. Director Marc Evans gradually unfolds the common plight of two parents who, for very different reasons, have found themselves balancing on the outer reaches of society. The relationship that emerges between Lynda and Alex is intricate and touching, frustrating and amusing in equal measures.

The writer is well informed, communicating through her own understanding of autism, (her young son has the condition). Weaver's performance is well judged and compelling.

Debby Elley

Send in your reviews of a book or DVD to aukidsmag@googlemail.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.

The Last Word



Heroes We Can Really Count On

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

The credit crunch has struck. The world of finance is on its knees. We're in recession. Things are going wrong - but not for long, according to my four year-old son. The Numberjacks are on their way. Quick - someone alert Gordon Brown.

The Numberjacks are cartoon characters on Cbeebies, or special agents to be precise, whose job it is to solve any of the universe's numerical difficulties. Say the FTSE index drops steeply, the Numberjacks will sort it. And by the way, they're hidden inside a sofa. Of course they are.

"Are the Numberjacks on their way?" my husband Gavin asks Bobby every morning. "YES," our son replies assertively. Good. Dad realises the importance of the situation. "That's a relief," says Gavin.

I know there are parents dealing with far more difficult obsessions, and I don't wish to sound peevish, but the Numberjacks have become all pervading. When I boot up the computer in the morning, the printer, which has obviously had a four year-old at its helm the previous day, proudly churns out about 50 assorted Numberjacks colouring-in pages. There's a little pile of them cut out by Bobby's bed. Until recently, he slept with Number 3. All this would probably strike the rest of the world as slightly perverse, but if you've got a kid with autism you know how it gets. Love me, love my Numberjacks.

The latest request is for Numberjacks ma-ga-zine. Magazine is quite a big word for Bobby, so he splits it up to sound like three. The ma-ga-

zine only comes out every three weeks, though. Bobby gets through his copy in approximately two days, whilst his twin Alec, during regular seek and destroy missions, manages to rip it to shreds within the next four, so we're out of luck within a week.

In the past I tried to explain to Bobby that Numberjacks magazine wasn't out yet, but that's quite a hard concept for a kid with autism to grasp. Every day for two weeks I was persuaded, cajoled and finally outright nagged into buying him another copy. In the end we put a Numberjacks sticker on the calendar to mark the date that another copy would be in the shops. That vaguely did the trick, but he still requested it every day.



Say the FTSE index drops steeply, the Numberjacks will sort it.

Then finally the day came.

"Numberjacks ma-ga-zine?" Bobby requested hopefully as he climbed into my car after school. "Look!" I could hardly contain my smugness. "What have I got here?"

As dazzling as Derren Brown, I conjured up the brand new Numberjacks magazine. He took it from me, not making nearly as much fuss as he should considering this had been top of his priority list for the last two weeks.

"Number 3!" He laughed from the back of the car. "Number 7!" Yes, all his favourite pin-ups were there. Then, seconds later: "Numberjacks TOYS!" Oh no, I don't believe it. Neither, I reckon, will Father Christmas. I just hope Santa's good with figures.



Numberjacks - Counting Down To Christmas

For other little fans of The Numberjacks, a Christmas Special is now out on DVD only. *Numberjacks - Counting Down To Christmas* is available at Amazon.co.uk priced £9.74



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Celebrity Spotlight



Hannah - age 9



Joshua - age 5 1/2

Star sign: Taurus.

Diagnosis: I was diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder at age 2 years and 3 months.

Best habit: Singing along to Abba songs like 'Mamma Mia' and 'Money, Money, Money'.

Worst habit: I enjoy tearing up newspapers and books into tiny little pieces and spreading them all around the house.

Hangs out at: Etherow Country Park feeding the geese and ducks. The steam engine hall of the Museum of Science and Industry.



Popular with: Everyone who meets me never forgets my happy-go-lucky personality and cheeky smile.

Song that most describes me: 'You're a Star' by James.

Personality in four words: Funny, mischievous, happy, determined.

I love: Walking in the countryside, jumping in the waves on the seashore and riding a bicycle with my dad.

I hate: Dogs, because they bark and are unpredictable. Also motorbikes and vacuum cleaners because they make too much noise.

If I were Prime Minister: Bacon butties would be compulsory at school snack time and ice-cream vans would be located on every street.



Star sign: No idea!

Diagnosis: I was diagnosed with autism in July 2007, during my last week at nursery school.

Best habit: Telling mummy that "I love you and like you", and rubbing in kisses. This means a lot to mummy because I didn't let anyone (even mummy) give me a kiss until very recently.

Worst habit: Telling people what to say.

Hangs out at: Lyme Park, Brookside and Wyevale garden centres and travelling on trains, trams and buses. I love to go out and about and am rarely at home.

Popular with: Everyone - I have a beautiful smile, a wonderful sense of humour, and unflinching honesty.



Song that most describes me: 'I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing'. This is my favourite song!

Personality in four words: Loving, funny, determined, meticulous.



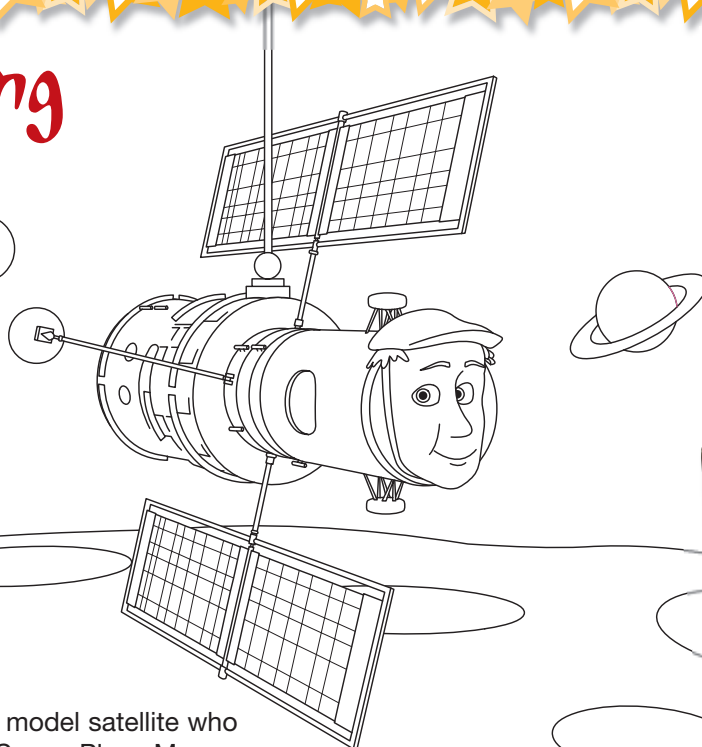
I love: Mummy, Daddy, Booboo and Bobo (my cats), ducks, swans and geese. I also like going out, playing (especially with my Tidmouth Shed set) and chicken nuggets.

I hate: Sudden loud noises, waiting, dogs and mashed potato.

If I were Prime Minister: I would ban hand-dryers, and have two days a week at school, and five days at home.

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@googlemail.com

Colouring Corner



Bernard is a model satellite who lives in The Space Place Museum.



Bernard is happy because he has a good view of all the planets in the Space Place Museum.



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