

Autkids™

Issue 6
Winter 2010
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Positive Parenting for Children with Autism Spectrum Conditions

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Girls' World:
Debby Elley and Tori Houghton get to
work on the next issue of AuKids.

Happy New Year
and welcome to our
sixth issue of
AuKids!

Those of you who are new to AuKids may think of us as an office-based crew of professionals with a big support team to back us up with administration. So it'll probably surprise you to hear that the photograph above is more of an accurate picture of what goes on behind the scenes at the magazine.

Yep, that's right, it's Debby and Tori, pens and paper at the ready, dreaming up ideas at Debby's dining room table. We'll let you know when we get a chic office with mahogany-panelled walls, but at the moment the AuKids team is small and cosy. We reckon it's this informal feel that gives the magazine its fun factor.

We've got a fantastic graphic designer, Jo Miller, who works at a discounted rate to transform our ideas into the exciting format you see before you. Photographer Jennie Fielden and cartoonist Christian Garland work for just a fraction of their professional fees to help us along the way. Animation experts Catalyst Pictures Ltd have been kind enough to redesign our website for a dramatically reduced fee, and so with the kindness of our professional friends and sponsors, we're gradually getting established.

We want AuKids to grow - so if you know anyone who would benefit from the magazine, please help us to spread the word.

We continue to seek sponsors to help us build on our success. Just a few hundred pounds makes an enormous difference, so do keep us posted of businesses you know that are linked to autism or socially responsible. As our database of subscribers starts to build, the extra help we get in 2010 will secure the long-term future of our venture.

Thanks again to our advertisers who continue to support AuKids as it grows. As well as advertising in our print edition there's a new opportunity to add a banner to our website and already it's looking pretty funky on www.aukids.co.uk as a result.

Consider yourself part of our team. We count on our readers to be our roving reporters, so don't forget to send us your stories, reviews, recommendations and photos.

Don't forget there's plenty of ways of getting in touch with us. You can look up our website and we're now on Facebook as well as Twitter. So come on, there's no excuse! Write to us at aukidsmag@googlemail.com with your news, views and reviews.

Enjoy the magazine and have a great 2010!

Tori and Debby



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.

Our front cover star is Jacob Leach. Jacob and his twin brother Oliver appear on Celebrity Spotlight Page 12. Both had a great time at the snow play area of Manchester's Chill Factor. For details look up www.chillfactore.com or call 0161 749 2222.

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Report Identifies Gaps in Support

Cerebra is a UK charity championing the rights of parents and carers whose children have neurological conditions. Last year the charity's new research team conducted a survey on parents' views to assess how they felt about the information and support currently available to them. Results of Cerebra's In The Dark survey were published in November 2009.

Previous research had shown that relevant and accessible information is a vital factor affecting a family's ability to cope with the demands of a child with a disability. It enables them to gain a better understanding of what they face and how to obtain the proper support.

Cerebra's In The Dark report showed that parents and carers need more information on care and management issues such as personal care, sleep, sibling relationships

and behaviour problems. Also identified was the need for better advice at the post-diagnosis stage, respite, holidays and qualified child care. Good information on useful charities and local support groups was also flagged up as a gap in provision.

Research officer Catherine Hylton told AuKids: "The results of this report confirmed what Cerebra already knows to be true - parents feel they do not have enough information regarding their child's disability and the many areas of their lives that this impacts upon.

"Cerebra feels that there is a need for one recognisable source of information for parents in order to provide a consistent, streamlined and above all clear approach to advising parents.

"We also recommend that there is greater collaboration between the Government and professionals to make sure parents are being catered for in the most effective way."

For more information on Cerebra look up www.cerebra.org.uk

Autism Bill Passed

The Autism Bill is now set to become the Autism Act.

According to the National Autistic Society, the act will guarantee a future Adult Autism Strategy that will introduce a range of legal duties to improve local services.

Mark Lever, chief executive of the NAS, said: "Thousands of adults with autism told us they were experiencing serious mental health difficulties due to a lack of support. After a year of lobbying, this is the watershed moment they have been waiting for - the Autism Act could literally transform lives. It will add serious weight to the forthcoming Adult Autism Strategy so now we'll be keeping the pressure up on Government to make sure they get it right and deliver lasting change for people with this serious, lifelong and disabling condition."

Under the Autism Act, the Government's forthcoming Adult Autism Strategy will be legally enforceable and must be published within the next six months. New responsibilities the NHS and local authorities will be expected to fulfil will include providing diagnostic services for adults with autism and better training for health and social care staff. For details look up www.nas.org.uk



Working for a Better Future

According to the National Autistic Society, 85 per cent of people with autism are without a full-time occupation, although most of them want to work and are capable of employment. The NAS's latest campaign, Don't Write Me Off, is putting this issue at the forefront of political debate. The campaign encourages people to write to their MPs asking for improvement in the benefit system as well as requesting a national strategy to transform access to employment. For more information look up www.dontwritemeoff.org

Danish Employer Heads to Britain

According to a recent report in The Independent, a highly-successful Danish company employing mainly autistic adults is due to open its first British branch in Glasgow this year.

Specialisterne, whose customers include Microsoft and Cisco Systems, was founded by Thorkil Sonne, whose son has autism. The company employs more than 40 people with autism spectrum conditions. Their phenomenal performance in memory, numeracy and concentration skills make them outstanding software testers.

Specialisterne uses a complex form of Lego® to assess the abilities of potential employees, whose condition means that they lack the social skills required for a formal interview process.

American Study Could Provide Anxiety Answers

According to Firstscience.com, three American universities are to conduct a million-dollar study to test the effectiveness of behavioural psychotherapy in treating anxiety among young adolescents with autism.

The two-year trial will take place at the University of Florida, the University of California and the University of Miami.

Firstscience.com quotes Eric Storch Phd, Associate Professor of Paediatrics and Psychiatry at the University of South Florida, who reports that anxiety disorders affect as many as 80 per cent of children and adolescents with autism spectrum conditions, triggering distress and impairment over and above that caused by an autism diagnosis alone.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has worked well for typically developing children with anxiety. The goal of the study is to adapt the CBT therapy for use in early adolescents with autism who suffer from anxiety.

Dr. Storch told First Science: "Our work developing a treatment protocol could substantially help address the mental health needs of early adolescents with autism."

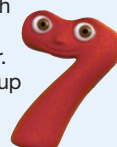
NAS Awards for Seashell Trust

The Seashell Trust in Cheadle, Cheshire, has been awarded Autism Accreditation by the National Autistic Society. The trust provides residential care and education for young people and adults with complex physical, learning and communication difficulties including autism.

Nice One, Numberjacks!

Great news for parents! The National Autistic Society has become the official charity of the Cbeebies show Numberjacks. The show is popular with many autistic children because of its numerical theme and programme bosses have teamed up with the autism charity to offer co-branded products this year.

For Numberjacks clips and games look up www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies



Pass the Pearls

Our parents share their words of wisdom

A diagnosis brings with it so many emotions. Wading through those early days isn't easy, in fact this is probably the steepest learning curve you've ever experienced.

You may not always have the fortune to meet someone who's been through it all and can pass on a gem or two, but we have! AuKids approached a group of parents whose children were diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Condition over two years ago. We asked them what they'd do differently if they could do it again. Here's what they told us...

Mark and Rick



"What I wish I'd done? Got help and support sooner. Listened to more people who had been there and not tried to do everything myself - you just get knackered. Laughed when Mark did something funny, rather than worry he only did it because he is autistic. Be proud of what he could do, not upset about what he could not. Mark is 80 per cent a little boy, 20 per cent autistic - so I should have spent 80 per cent of my time enjoying the 80 per cent, not worrying about the 20 per cent!" Mark's dad, Rick.

"Spend time talking to other parents and attending groups, even if they are not specific to autism. Other parents have been the biggest strength to us. They have been able to share experiences with us that 'professionals' just could not touch. Also, they have been a wealth of information and support." Shiloh's mum, Lorna.

"Don't assume 'professionals' have all the information and solutions. I have the greatest respect for those who have worked with my son and been able to say 'No, I didn't know that, thanks for that info, I'll look into it.' Do your research. Be prepared to be unpopular - you are your child's advocate." Shiloh's mum, Lorna.

"My advice is that you cannot deal with everything, so make sure you pick your battles wisely." Mark's dad, Rick.

"I wish I'd not spent too much energy comparing Joe with his peers. No matter what your child is like, no-one likes a competitive mum!" Helen, Joe's mum.

"I wish I had taken more risks earlier. Doing something outside your child's comfort zone or taking on a new experience doesn't always result in tears and tantrums. Sometimes there are new things that your child will embrace and enjoy. Sometimes it's worth the preparation and can be a rewarding and positive experience. Travelling aboard, going to a restaurant or joining a climbing club have opened up Oscar's world. However, it does mean sometimes taking the bad experiences on the chin!" Oscar's mum, Lesley.

"I wish that I had written a daily diary on Joshua from being one. Then I could look back more at how much he has come on and show him when he is older just what we did for him. I also wish I hadn't spent so long trying to blame myself and just accepted him for who he is." Joshua's mum, Lesley.



Lesley and Josh

"I had a different experience than most people here because we were still living in South Africa when Helen was diagnosed. There was no support groups or anyone else to talk to, so it was an extremely distressing and depressing time for me. For someone living in the UK, my advice would be to talk to as many people as possible. I went to the support group meetings of the National Autistic Society until I had to start working. They were wonderful, and it was so good to talk to other parents of children with autism." Helen's mum, Bobby.

"I wish I had not concentrated on other people's negativity to my son which could be so hurtful and demoralising. Over the years I have armed myself with a thick skin, a wicked sense of humour and a wealth of razor sharp responses. Remember it's their ignorance - not yours." Oscar's mum, Lesley.

"I wish I'd trusted my instincts: Ed ended up in hospital for several days having been dismissed by three different doctors because he didn't behave like a typically ill child. Generally, you really do know best!" Ed's mum, Katie.

"I also wish I'd been more proactive in getting all the benefits I was entitled to as soon as I could (e.g. Disability Living Allowance) so that you have that bit of extra money if you need to hire babysitters or whatever." Helen's mum, Bobby.

Oscar and Lesley

"I wish I had not felt guilty about my son's sibling. My eldest son was five years old when Oscar was diagnosed. He experienced the emotional ups and downs alongside me. I felt guilty he didn't always get 'mummy time' because mummy was dealing with a trauma or two. He is now 14 years old. He is a beautiful, well-rounded, caring individual with a social conscience and an understanding that things are not always what they seem. He is incredibly proud of his brother's achievements. Given his age, he is deeply embarrassed by his mother - but not of his younger brother." Oscar's mum, Lesley.



Ed and Katie

"We learnt to concentrate on helping him to listen, not just to talk." *Ed's mum, Katie.*

"I wish I'd focused more on what he could do, not on what he couldn't. Being able to see the positives in your child is so much more encouraging." *Connor's mum, Elaine.*

"I'd have spent less time being a therapist and feeling guilty about how much I was doing to 'help' my child and more time just mucking about and having fun. You only learn later that mucking about, tickling and giggling is as good for autistic kids as sitting them down and doing something 'brainy'. I'm sure kids sense the pressure on them to perform as well. Take that pressure off and they tend to be happier." *Bobby and Alec's mum, Debby.*

"As well as guilt, pride and anger influencing parents' behaviour (and therefore decision-making) I think ignorance about the condition of autism also plays a large part. Speaking personally, if I had my time again, the first thing I would do is educate myself with all the information about autism, child development and brain development that is coming out of cutting edge research." *Philip's mum, Zoe.*

"I wish I'd asked for help earlier. I thought 'I can handle this, I'm their mum,' and it was only after I'd virtually crumbled with exhaustion that I admitted I needed some help. Asking for help does not mean that you're a poor parent. It's a strength. When help finally came, all my energy returned with it." *Bobby and Alec's mum, Debby.*

"It's hard to watch your child work so hard to learn the simple things we take for granted like playing or talking, but in hindsight the sense of achievement when they succeed makes it all worthwhile." *Ed's mum, Katie.*

"I know all children are different. Some will be able to achieve a lot as they get older and others may not. When Daniel was a toddler I didn't think we would ever be able to get him to speak. The future seemed very bleak, but he is now 12 and in a mainstream high school that just happens to have experience with ASC kids. He's a fantastic boy and is doing very well and making such wonderful progress the older he gets. He's very happy at his new school and we are all very proud of him.

I heard so much negativity about Daniel's future when he was younger, I just wanted to inject a bit of positivity to anyone reading and feeling a bit down about their child's future. It can be very isolating and difficult when they are young. I know how that feels but things do get better. I wouldn't change a thing about Daniel now and with the help of everyone around him he is growing into a lovely young man." *Daniel's mum, Jackie.*



Bobby, Debby and Alec



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A Spectrum of Light

Inspirational Interviews with Families Affected by Autism

By Francesca Bierens

2010

Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers

ISBN 9781849050135

£12.99

After we'd approached our own group of parents for this feature, AuKids came across *A Spectrum of Light*. Check it out for even more heart-warming stories and pearls of wisdom from parents.

It's written by a Speech and Language therapist, Francesca Bierens, who has interviewed ten families of children with autism spectrum conditions over 14 years. The book contains extracts from these interviews in the parents' words - real and unabridged. These are wonderful realistic views of journeys, the highs and the lows of life with a child with autism. The message that comes out loud and strong is that even though there may be difficult times, there are many more good times and celebrations. The last chapter contains extracts from follow-up interviews with the original families 14 years later, including interviews with two of the children, now adults.

Each page contains a quotable nugget of advice but we've selected some of the best ones to complement our own parents' pearls..... Enjoy!

"It's about making things fit for Joseph not Joseph fit into things and that just goes a lot more smoothly" *Joseph's mother.*

Taken from *A Spectrum of Light*.

"It's finding ways to help her with that particular obsession. How can I make that particular interest work for me so that it doesn't drive me crazy? I wish I'd known more of that when she was younger." *Eleanor's mother.*

Taken from *A Spectrum of Light*.

"They (my parents) accepted me for who I was. It's understanding. It's knowing this person is different and you're respecting them for it. You're not trying to change them. It's not a disease. That's just something you have to work with." *David, 23, who has autism.*

Taken from *A Spectrum of Light*.

“My Son is Obsessed with Trains”

Everywhere we go he looks out for trains and if he sees one or a picture of one in a shop he gets very distressed if we can't go in and look at it. I don't know how to manage this. Are there ways in which I can use his obsession productively without feeling like I'm feeding this and making things worse in the long run?



Luke Beardon

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

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

First off, the term 'obsession' is one fraught with (usually negative) connotations - so avoid using it if possible. As noted by someone on one of my courses, 'passionate interest' is far more accurate as a definition.

Secondly, so long as the interest is not inappropriate (e.g. unlawful, or detrimental to others or self) then try to embrace it rather than assume the worst. In reality passionate interests are critical for motivational purposes, and can be a great source of comfort and positivity for the individual.

My take in such situations tends to be to turn the whole thing on its head and proactively encourage the interest - but within certain

stipulated boundaries, rather than the more negative way of trying to stop it - which will only be met with resistance! Try and be as structured as possible about encouraging the interest - for example, *"When we go out I will help you look for three trains/pictures and we won't come home until we have found them"*. Or, *"If you manage to do the shopping without being distracted there will be a new train picture for you at home when we get back."*

Obviously you need to be careful what you promise and this takes a degree of imagination! This approach often gains trust straight away and can reduce the need for the individual to *have* to engage at every possible moment - because they know there is something to look forward to.

Think to yourself - is it easier to say 'no' to that chocolate/bun/pint/cake if you know that you will get it just around the corner if you wait a bit longer? Similarly, people with autism find it much easier if they know when/how they will be able to engage in their passionate interest, and this should reduce the need to engage in it at every given opportunity.



Dr Paul Holland
PhD C.Psychol. AFBPSS

Paul is a Chartered Psychologist based at the Department of Psychology, City University, London.

He is also a columnist for SEN magazine - the Journal for Special Needs.

Obsessional interests are considerable diagnostic criteria of ASC. As long as the obsession with trains that your son experiences does not impact negatively on his ability to learn, communicate and socialize, I would use the obsession to your advantage.

For example you could use the obsession with trains to motivate and reward, develop skills, increase social opportunities and improve self-esteem.

Often I have used obsessions to teach. A multitude of skills and abilities that need to be taught can be taught via trains. Furthermore, these skills and abilities can then be transferred to other areas.

If you think about trains, you may think of an engine and carriages. But if you *really* think about what you could be working with, the list grows dramatically: trains have doors, windows, wheels, nuts, bolts, seats, racks, toilets, conductors, drivers, passengers (people), engines, carriages, carpet, metal, glass, plastic, etc. Trains are all different colours, shapes, sizes, lengths, heights etc. Trains can be electric, steam-powered, diesel powered etc. The list goes on!

All of these can be broken down even further: different types of windows, different people, all of the colours of the rainbow, all shapes, sizes etc. In addition to the 'things' that we can use to teach, the areas of teaching are limited only by our imagination. All skills can be taught using trains, for example, receptive discrimination (the ability to identify objects and/or perform actions when given a label or instruction e.g. "Where is the shoe?" or "Clap your hands") expressive labelling, imitation, matching, counting, colouring, requesting, singing, storytelling, playing, etc.

There are obviously many other interventions that you could use to help deal with the obsession but if you can use something that your son truly likes and enjoys to teach and learn, then learning will become an enjoyable experience for you both!



“When I’m feeling poetic I usually compare them this way: An obsession is like an intoxicating infatuation that flares up and makes me giddy, but that sooner or later will fade away quietly and die. A special interest is like true love, it warms me and is always there, I will never tire of it and I’ll always feel the same way about it and return to it.”

Skilpadde, an adult with Asperger Syndrome as quoted on www.wrongplanet.net



**Louise Page M.A.I.P.C.,
Q.M.A.C.A. (Australia)**

Professional Counsellor

Professionally trained Autism
Therapist

Mother of three teenage children
(one son diagnosed ASC)

Some obsessive behaviours in children, particularly children who are described as being on the autism spectrum, can be attributed to passionate interests.

To help counteract any distress for your son when it is time to ‘move on’ and pass the shop window or even a railway crossing, we can become creative in how to kindly divert their intense attention by having, for example, ‘portable’ methods and/or activities which can relate to what they have focused on, but allow the parent to continue past the ‘attraction’ point.

Some creative ideas could be obtaining a pasting book in

which a collection of pictures of his favourite trains (styles, colours, ‘characters’) can be pasted. While travelling with this book, he can compare the trains he sees around him with the examples in his book. He can then be momentarily distracted from focusing on the train picture in the shop window, hopefully to continue on his way with you as he relates what he has seen to the pictures in his scrapbook.

Perhaps if he finds it difficult to move on, you may ask the shop owner, for example, for permission to photograph the train so that your son may add it to his scrapbook collection. On the way home, he can continue to enjoy the captured image and hopefully not be upset by being withdrawn from an intense point of interest. This can then be printed out at home and added to his scrapbook.

By providing a small variety of similar interest items relating to a passion, children can be helped to diversify.

With your son’s passion for trains, you may be witnessing a preview of future skills, such as an interest in logical (e.g. mathematical) systems, observations in detail, patterns, structure and design.



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.

Your son’s obsession is likely to provide him with relaxation, sensory stimulation or a sense of order or purpose to what can often be a confusing life.

A little indulgence in something we enjoy is essential for everyone, provided the obsession is not ‘risky’ and it doesn’t completely take over

your life. Eliminating obsessions can be distressing and sometimes unnecessary, so I think your inclination to use your son’s obsession with trains *productively* is positive.

You could incorporate time to look at trains at the end of each shopping trip. This should be communicated to your child both before and during the shopping trip in a way that he understands (i.e. using visual cues like symbols or photographs).

I advise imposing a time limit on the activity (by using an alarm on your mobile phone for example) to let your son know when the activity has finished. It is important that you carry out the promised activity while also making sure that you stick to the limits imposed. The key is to limit the time of the obsession in a way that allows both of you to complete important and rewarding activities, in your case shopping and in your son’s, examining trains!



**Do you have a question for Ask the Panel?
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DELTA’S A-Z: Delta is fascinated by maps. He says “1,000 millions and 20,000 more - this is what maps mean to me”.

Some Kids Have All the Fun

By Debby Elley

Liz Howard is thrilled, or 'made up' as they say in Merseyside. Her company, The Novelty Warehouse (www.thenoveltywarehouse.com), has just scooped a runners-up prize in the Best New Business category of the Morgan Foundation Awards.

The Novelty Warehouse, an online store selling more than 900 sensory toys for children with special needs, was one of just five finalists under the Best New Business category of the awards, which were established two years ago to encourage entrepreneurship in the North West of England and North Wales.

Prizes are presented to business owners with vision and drive who are seen to be trailblazers in their field.

The entrepreneurial mum-of-two was a stock controller for 18 years before she set upon a new career path. These days it's not paperwork that fills every working hour - instead she can be found knee-deep in a colourful collection of exciting sensory toys that bounce, glow, whistle and wobble.

“I had no idea at the time that these sorts of stimulating toys were so useful for special needs children.”

The delightfully squasy feeling of a stress ball sinking under the fingers is something that we've all experienced as a calming sensation. For children with autism, though, sensory play isn't merely a way of having fun but an opportunity for vital development and learning.

Among children with Autism Spectrum Conditions, problems with sensory integration - that is, the brain's ability to process sensory information effectively - is very common. Sensory toys can help an autistic child to develop whilst having fun, as they often enjoy them more than standard toys designed for children who can get pleasure from imaginative play.

Trawling through the bulging aisles at The Novelty Warehouse's Wallasey headquarters, I'm already up to my ears in potential purchases and I've only been here five minutes.

There's LED light-up wands that would mesmerise sensory-seeking kids who crave visual stimulation. There's stretchy toys for tetchy days and messy toys for rainy-day play. There's an agonising choice of light-up balls with different textures and effects, perfect for playing an exciting game of 'to' and 'fro' and encouraging interaction.

Some toys have a calming and relaxing effect - there are bubble tubes and fibre optic sticks,



Sensory Surprises: Liz with her sons Jack (left) and George.

toys that gently glow or have a calming texture. Others can be used to reinforce positive behaviour, or redirect negative behaviour.

Toys that respond to the slightest sound give great feedback and encourage communication skills. Among them are the Light Doodler, which rewards sounds by creating magical light shows, and my favourite - Pirate Pete - a parrot which repeats everything you say - twice. I've found that this is great when you're telling off the kids, as you don't have to repeat yourself, Pete does it for you!

For more sound rewards, there's quacking ducks, warbling birds, noisy monkeys, hooting owls...if the list isn't endless, it certainly seems it.

Fiddlers and twiddlers will also love the store's vast array of fidget toys, including the popular Ollie the Octopus clacker, whose plastic feet make satisfying percussion sounds when swung together.



work - you don't really switch off from a job like this - but then, it's not like a job at all, really. I know that what I'm doing is so important, and that it matters so much to people.”

Originally, Liz had not planned to launch a shop for special needs children. After starting up a store on Ebay selling flashing novelties which had gone down a storm at her PTA-run school discos, she found herself inundated with requests from parents and teachers of special needs children.

“I didn't really expect this reaction. I had no idea at the time that these sorts of stimulating toys were so useful for special needs children. All these parents and teachers were contacting me, wanting these flashing, stimulating sensory items. I was really surprised to find that nowhere else seemed to sell them affordably all in one place,” she said.

After finishing a business course, researching the special needs market and taking good advice from a group of special needs teachers who had become loyal customers, Liz launched her specialist website. The Novelty Warehouse was opened in 2008 and she hasn't looked back since.

After a string of awards, her latest prize is perhaps the most satisfying, as it recognises the importance of a business such as hers. “Finally I can relax and think - well, it's not just me who thinks this is a good idea!” she laughs.

The store's sensory resources are widely used by The National Autistic Society, The National Portage Association and The British Association of Play Therapists.



By the end of a morning's tour I'm exhausted - it's a good thing this is an online store, that's all I can say. Other parents seem inspired, too.

“One parent kept buying our toy spiders - mum said they were the only way they could reach their autistic son, and it opened up a window so they could communicate with him. That was fantastic to hear,” says Liz.

“Another time, a mother told me that she managed to get her baby daughter to self-feed through using one of our urchin balls. The little girl learnt to accept having the different texture in her hands that she finally picked food up by herself - something that she'd never done before.

“I get a real buzz out of hearing these stories. It's what makes it rewarding for me. It's hard



To find out more look up The Novelty Warehouse at www.thenoveltywarehouse.com



Putting the Pieces Together

By Tori Houghton



New Kids on the Block

Iqra watching Bobby put the finishing touches to his Lego® movie, while George and Junayd chat in the background.

As a speech and language therapist working with children with autism, I am always interested to hear about new techniques to help develop social skills. A clinical psychologist in America, Dan Legoff, (I kid you not!) developed the idea of 'Lego® therapy' and Dr Gina Gomez de la Cuesta of the National Autistic Society researched it for her PhD and ran after school groups at Cambridge University.

After attending a talk by Gina Gomez on Lego® therapy, I was intrigued to see how the idea of using Lego® to help children problem solve, interact, communicate and understand others would actually work.

At the moment, this idea is in its infancy in the UK. As no 'official' training for this type of club has yet been designed, some unofficial clubs have started up run by people who like the idea and have heard Gina Gomez talk about it. That's not to say these clubs are sanctioned by Legoff, rather than simply inspired by his idea.

Julia Butcher at The National Autistic Society Resource Centre in Northenden, Manchester, ran the centre's first Lego® club from September to December last year. Nine children aged between five and thirteen signed up to participate. Despite different ages and different levels of ability, they all had one common interest - Lego®!

Three volunteers including myself attended the fortnightly sessions, facilitating problem solving, helping the children to understand other people's emotions and how to manage difficult situations appropriately.

Legoff proposes small structured groups of children, with each individual having an

assigned role. The 'engineer' firstly reads the instructions and communicates which pieces of Lego® are required. The 'supplier' then locates the appropriate piece to give to the 'builder' who is responsible for constructing the model. Roles are rotated during each session so that every child has a turn at each job.

We started our Lego® club by following the specified group structure. However as the weeks progressed, we found dictating the roles a little too restrictive for our group of children. Instead we focused on nurturing natural interactions and co-operation within the group.

It was great to see the children's confidence growing as the weeks progressed.

“ Having a familiar, structured activity such as Lego® gave them a confident starting point from which they could improve their interaction skills. ”

Of course, Lego® was the conversation point and everyone had something to say about it! They were focused, engaged and involved. If they did want some time to build by themselves, this was allowed.

Older group members were encouraged to help the younger ones with more complex structures and it was lovely to see the children beginning to develop friendships. Parents reported that they talked about their new friends from Lego® club.

A club is a group of people with a shared interest. Lego® club gave these children a context for social interaction, opportunities to share experiences and learn from each other.

Having witnessed the idea in action, I've become convinced that children don't need a

highly specialised approach in order to benefit socially from a club. Whether the shared interest is Lego®, dinosaurs or Hannah Montana, all it takes is the right type of support and ALL children can be motivated to enjoy interaction and make new friends.



Small World

Nathan gets stuck in.



Team Building

Iqra and Junayd build the foundations for Lego® City!

As part of Lego® club one week Julia invited Barry Skillin (www.animationnation.co.uk) along, who showed the children how to make Lego® movies. You can see the animations the children made on You Tube. Go to www.youtube.co.uk and search under Victoria Road Lego® Club Animations.

Gina Gomez de la Cuesta is hoping to run some more courses in the future and is in collaboration with Lego® Ltd and Dan Legoff to further the scheme. For more information, or to find out if any similar clubs are running in your area, contact Gina at Georgina.Gomez@nas.org.uk

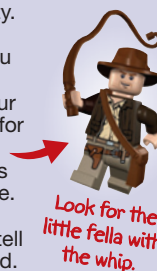
Hunt for Indiana Jones!

AuKids is offering three lucky readers the chance to win a 2010 Lego® calendar, featuring a host of little characters in quirky situations, bound to make you giggle!



The calendar normally retails at £7.99 and 100% of the profits made from sales are donated to the National Autistic Society.

We've done our bit by buying them - now all you have to do is enter our competition! Just ask your child to help you search for our tiny Lego® character, hidden somewhere in this issue of AuKids magazine. Drop us a line with your name and address, and tell us where he can be found.



Look for the little fella with the whip.

Three winners drawn at random before the closing date of February 21st will each receive a Lego® calendar. Email aukidsmag@googlemail.com or write your answer on a postcard to AuKids magazine, PO Box 259, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 9BE.

One entry per person, editor's decision is final, no cash alternative.

What They Thought About Lego®



"Lego® club is quite good and very fun because I made a new friend and liked playing with the Lego®!" Nathan, Lego® club member aged 10.



"The Lego® club is a fantastic idea as they are socially interacting with other children without actually realising it," Michelle, Nathan's Mum.



"The most defining moment for me was about 4 sessions in when we decided to wait for all the children to get there before we got out the Lego®. After about 5 minutes, they all started playing football in the hall. They were all joining in in their own way, laughing and really enjoying themselves.

"It felt like we had reached the whole goal of Lego® club. These children had made friends with each other and were playing together. One parent popped her head round and said that if anyone else were to see this, they would never know the children had autism." Jess, Lego® club helper.



"As a child you are able to create almost anything from the pile on the carpet or from the contents of the box before you; making something representative of what you can see in your mind, exploring concepts of symmetry, proportion, and scale... I have lots of happy memories of building space ships, cars, trucks, houses, and towns (albeit small) using Lego®." Adam Meyer, an adult with Asperger Syndrome.

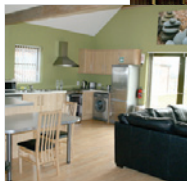
To obtain a copy of the original papers by Legoff, email Julia.Butcher@nas.org.uk



Reviews



HOLIDAY CENTRE
The Thomas Centre,
Lincolnshire



As a parent of a seven year-old autistic child, the idea of going on holiday was not always a welcoming one - to me it would be a different location, different set of people but the same stares! Our daughter Sacha struggles with new places, new routines and hates queuing and shopping with a passion. That rules out many things on an average holiday.

But all is not lost. Three years ago, we stumbled upon an advertisement for a place called The Thomas Centre in Lincolnshire - a self catering holiday specifically for communication-impaired children and adults, a centre that provides a holiday location for the whole family.

Our first holiday was in May 2006 and since then we have returned twice a year. Richard, Jan and Val, who do the day-to-day running of the centre, are extremely accommodating to each family's needs and will remove breakables from the house, remove books if your child loves shredding them and provide stair-gates as needed.

Richard and Jan have an 18 year-old son, Thomas, who has autism. Thomas was their inspiration for setting up this holiday centre.

What works so well about it is its size. There's six converted barns, three houses and three bungalows, so even at the peak of the summer holidays it is still relaxing and quiet.

The accommodation is all four and five-star rated and is beautifully done, a real home from home. To the rear of the barns there is a play area for toddlers and a fenced in area where Sacha loves spending time on her trike. There is also an indoor area with pool table, skittles and table football for the older ones.

The best bit for us though, is the indoor swimming pool, which can be booked out for an hour a day solely for your own family's use.

At the Thomas Centre, no one judges you and nobody stares and it's so interesting to talk to other people staying there and share experiences with each other.

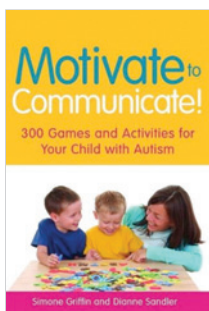
The centre has a wealth of information and books if you wish to read them during your stay and each Sunday there is a coffee morning in the community room that gives you the opportunity to meet other families who are staying there. We've been helping to raise funds for an adventure playground which is planned for the near future.

All I can say about this place is 'Fantastic!'

Emma Paddle, Sacha's mum

For more information, look up
www.thethomascentre.co.uk

BOOK



Motivate to Communicate!
300 Games and Activities for Your Child with Autism

By Simone Griffin and Dianne Sandler
2009

Published by Jessica Kingsley

£12.99

ISBN 9781849050418

It's often said - usually as a form of comfort - that children don't come with a manual. But boy oh boy is this true with autistic kids. Of all the parenting skills that you anticipate stumbling over, somehow you never consider playing to be one of them. Yet of all the natural parenting abilities that I've had to learn to adapt for my autistic sons, learning how to play with them was the hardest - and most valuable talent to master.

And yes, playing productively with an autistic child is an actual *talent*, so stick it on your CV.

It's difficult to accept at first that standard imaginative play may not appeal to your child, and sometimes disconcerting when attempts at 'normal' activities seem to fail. Books like **Motivate to Communicate!** will fill parents everywhere with hope, enthusiasm and inspiration.

This book's ideas are simple: you don't need to be a creative genius, or in possession of any obscure play items, to make it work. Many of the games are simply clever adaptations, designed for the purpose of making the most out of communication opportunities. Some of them are so obvious that you could actually slap yourself for not having thought of them earlier. One of my sons hasn't grasped the concept of 'hide and seek' - I'd never thought of playing in pairs, though, to show him how to hide.

The authors - Dianne is a specialist teacher and Simone a speech and language therapist - live in the real world, and have tried their ideas out on a willing audience of volunteers. Flexible, adaptable and oh such big fun, this will appeal to parents and grandparents alike.

Debby Elley

BOOK



It Can Get Better...
Dealing with common behaviour problems in young children with autism: a guide for parents and carers

By Paul Dickinson and Liz Hannah

1998

Published by the National Autistic Society

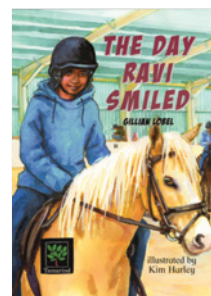
Available from the National Autistic Society website at www.nas.org.uk at £5 excl. VAT Code: NAS 284

ISBN 978-1-899280-0-32

If you want easy to read, upbeat help and advice on a range of issues, I'd thoroughly recommend **It Can Get Better... Dealing with common behaviour problems in young children with autism: a guide for parents and carers**. This handy little manual gives sensible advice on a range of common problems such as tantrums, toileting, sleep and eating problems and repetitive behaviour.

Advice is broken down into bite-sized bullet points and the manual is packed with useful, encouraging tips. I particularly liked the self-help section, where parents are encouraged to break tasks down into simple components that can be ticked off, with 'washing' illustrated as an example. It's clear that the authors not only understand autistic children - even more importantly, perhaps, they understand parents. At just £5, it really is the best value advice around (apart from AuKids, of course, ahem).

Debby Elley



BOOK

The Day Ravi Smiled

By Gillian Lobel

2005

Published by Tamarind

£4.99

ISBN 9781870516761

This is a children's book that features a Riding For the Disabled stables called Penniwells - which actually does exist in the Hertfordshire countryside. See www.penniwellsrda.org.uk if you'd like to pay them a visit. The story is written from the viewpoint of a disabled youngster and the title hero - Ravi - is autistic. Our young reviewer, Georgia, has several friends with disabilities.

I think this is for children aged seven years old and over. It is easy to read and the pictures are really colourful and interesting to look at. Joy makes the story so exciting. It made me want to keep reading to get to the next exciting bit. I liked it that Joy told the story rather than an adult. I really loved it when Joy described the horses, especially Tyson. It made me feel I was at Penniwells being shown around. The ending was lovely. It made me happy when Ravi wouldn't be scared and alone any more. I want to go to Penniwells.

It looks a safe, fun place to go to.

Georgia, aged 10.

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

Autism is Other People's Worry, Not Mine

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



I've got this theory about the brain. As yet it is untested by science, but I think it holds up in a pseudo-scientific-pop-culture-pap sort of a way.

Everyone has a space inside their brain reserved especially for worry. The size of that space depends on what sort of character you are. Here's the thing - the space stays the same size, no matter what. Your worries just expand or contract to fit it.

“ Mothers of course, HAVE to worry, it's their job. And being a mum of autistic kids, well, you're never short of material. ”

If I'm not stressed, I'll always find something to worry about, because the space needs to be filled. If I've got loads going on, I'll just cope better and my worries will contract. Some of the smaller worries will just hitchhike to another corner of my brain. The amount that I worry remains roughly the same on a daily basis, it's just that the stuff that I concern myself with alternates between what's essentially pointless and what's ground-shakingly important.

I'd argue that women, being analytical creatures, own more worry space in general than men. Mothers of course, HAVE to worry, it's their job. And being a mum of autistic kids, well, you're never short of material.

My worries tend to seesaw between the twins. When Bobby is causing me less worry - that's fine, I just worry *more* about Alec.

There are three sorts of 'autism' worry that I experience. Number one: fear for the future, a good one, as it can keep you busy for ages and most of the time you can do naff all about it. Short of



applying for a job for each of the twins myself eighteen years in advance of the deadline for CVs, there's not much that I can currently achieve re: their career prospects.

Number two, worrying about a current situation, including interesting but off-beat behaviour such as emptying the sugar bowl all over the kitchen floor. I must admit I find those sorts of worries, if not overwhelming, a good thing. They motivate me to get help and information. AuKids magazine is a response to this sort of 'productive' worry.

“ We all judge each other constantly, it's just we're more sensitive to reactions when we know that our children don't conform. ”

Number three is the most pointless sort of worry of all - what other people think. Of course, this type of worry depends on how much you fretted over other people's opinions before you had kids. Before we had children, my husband never gave a stuff about what other people thought, which was just as well considering he once sported a lemon-coloured jersey and drove a Fiat Panda.

Now that we've got kids, he still doesn't give a monkey's, in

particular about people's reactions to the twins' autism. If someone wants to watch Alec yodelling down an aisle at B&Q, let them, he says. At least he's enjoying the experience, which is more than can be said for the average Sunday-afternoon DIYer.

This healthy sort of response to the general ignorance of Joe Public can only be beneficial. I could spend about four days articulating my case in favour of my little defendants to a packed court - but is anyone really interested? Am I merely assuming negative thoughts? From the scores of terrific professionals who have helped me over the years, it's clear that sympathy and understanding are as common as ignorance.

There are of course T-shirts that say 'I'm Not Naughty, I'm Autistic'. I like those T-shirts, but it's a shame that people see the need for them. Why should we have to justify ourselves to the entire supermarket? If the twins are obliged to wear one of those, I may as well put on one that says 'I'm not a slobby mum, I am buying ready made rubbish for this week ONLY'. We all judge each other constantly, it's just we're more sensitive to reactions when we know that our children don't conform.

If the public don't understand what they see, though, that's their worry. My only problem is their ignorance. Of all the things to concern myself about, what other people think will never be the worry that spoils my happiness.



The Space Place is an animated series designed to help children on the autism spectrum to understand expressions. The DVD pack includes twelve fun-packed episodes, interactive games and facial expression playing cards.

For your chance to win a copy of the Space Place DVD pack, answer the following question.

- What is Rakesh?
a) A Moon Buggy
b) A Rover
c) A Space Telescope

Answer can be found at www.spaceplace.tv

Send your answers to aukidsmag@googlemail.com or on a postcard to AuKids magazine, PO Box 259, Cheadle, Cheshire SK8 9BE no later than March 5th 2010. Only one entry per person, no cash alternative.

The Space Place DVD pack is available to buy online at www.spaceplace.tv



Readers' Page



Oliver Noah Leach
aged 6

Celebrity Spotlight



Jacob Roy Leach
aged 6

Diagnosis: Learning/development delays with autistic tendencies.

My family (family members and any pets): Daddy, Mummy, twin brother Jacob and George the cat.

School: Park Lane Special Needs School, Macclesfield.

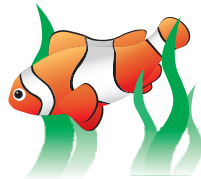
I love: Computers, my VTech Kidizoom digital camera and Mummy's mobile phone!

I hate: Chocolate!

Song that most describes me: *Flying Without Wings*, Westlife.

If I were Prime Minister: I would try to ensure all special needs schools remained open and adequately funded.

Ambition: To snorkel in the Indian Ocean and watch the fantastic sea life and to 'find Nemo'.



Diagnosis: Learning/development delays with autistic tendencies.

My family (family members and any pets): Daddy, Mummy, twin brother Oliver and George the cat.

School: Park Lane Special Needs School, Macclesfield.

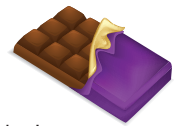
I love: Listening to Daddy play guitar, cuddling Dipsy and chocolate!

I hate: Nothing springs to mind, I'll try anything!

Song that most describes me: *The World's Greatest*, R Kelly.

If I were Prime Minister: I would make music compulsory in ALL schools.

Ambition: To play a guitar solo in front of a packed Eastlands Stadium.



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

P.S.

Up in the Air Again!

Following a critically acclaimed run at the Manchester International Festival in July 2009 Oily Cart and aerial theatre company Ockham's Razor will be reviving *Something in the Air* in April and May 2010. *Something in the Air* is an interactive aerial show specifically created for young people with complex disabilities or an Autism Spectrum Condition.



The show will be at the Unicorn Theatre, London from 23rd April - 8th May 2010 and at Galeri in North Wales from 26th May - 29th May 2010.

For more information contact Oily Cart on 020 8672 6329 or look up www.oilycart.org.uk

www.aukids.co.uk

At the American website www.children-succeed.com there's a host of great games for autistic children and kids with Asperger Syndrome who need extra help to improve their social and communication skills. Created by school psychologist Joan Nash, it's got plenty to inspire every parent.

We've just come across a new American website about sensory processing disorders. Look up www.spdfoundation.net/index.html to get clued up on sensory issues.

Fledglings is a national charity which aims to assist parents and carers of disabled children by identifying, sourcing and supplying practical, affordable products to address every day issues. Products include made to measure sleepsuits, popper vests and swimwear PLUS some great solutions for messy eaters and drinkers. To request a brochure, look up www.fledglings.org.uk or call 0845 458 1124.

Love a child with autism? Want to shout it from the rooftops? No problem. At www.iloveachild-withautism.com you can by T-shirts, mugs and even mousemats to declare your allegiance with all things ASC and help to make the world a more positive place. This is an American website but they're happy to ship to the UK.

Tired of your child being left out in the cold when it comes to sports? Disability Snowsport UK is a nationwide registered charity, based at the Chill Factor in Manchester. It provides adaptive skiing for individuals with any disability, including autism and learning difficulties.

For further information on adaptive skiing at the Chill Factor, call 0161 749 2290 or e-mail Rachel@disabilitysnowsport.org.uk or look up www.disabilitysnowsport.org.uk



Think green!
Recycle AuKids

