



Aspiehelp / The Aspire Trust June 2017 Newsletter

Edited by Anna Melling

In this newsletter: Anna joins Aspiehelp, Aspiehelp Roundup plans, and an article from The Independent about hearing, music and autism.

Anna joins Aspiehelp

Hi, I'm Anna! I've just joined Aspiehelp to take over from Hazel as the Office Manager. I'll be editing these newsletters from now on, as well as looking after finances and other office duties and paperwork.

The new offices at Aspiehelp look like a great work environment! I look forward to performing a role which will make a positive difference in people's lives.

I have a computer-related background, including some office work which will definitely be valuable to this role. Working as part of a small team seems ideal to me.

In my spare time I practise Tai Chi and Kung Fu at Chans' Martial Arts.



The Aspie Round Up

Friday 17th and Saturday 18th of November



We will be partnering with the University of Canterbury Disability Resources Centre to host workshops. The planned location is the Undercroft Seminar Room, below the Central Library at University of Canterbury.

Workshops covering:

- Life, Education, Employment and Community
- How to empower people on the Autism Spectrum

We will be opening for submissions soon.

Dr Stephen Mark Shore, Clinical Assistant Professor in Special Needs and Autism at Adelphi University, will send us a DVD about "Awesome Autism". Stephen is himself on the spectrum. He is also the Patron of Aspiehelp / The Aspire Trust.

To be added to our email list to receive news flashes, and notification when submissions open, please email olivia@aspiehelp.com



Leith's Corner

This last month has not been so busy except that I have finally finished my application for Registration as a Social Worker! One part was sent back to me to revise as they were not convinced I would be "culturally safe" with Maori clients.. despite all my autobiographical information about my early life in the backblocks of the Urewera Country in a Maori community!

We have made an agreement with Community Funding Services to take over financial administration and applications for funding for us for the foreseeable future. This is potentially a huge weight off our shoulders!

Leith went to an induction course at the Men's Prison (this is done every two years for volunteers) and found it very hard going. Not Aspie friendly at all!

Olivia had her birthday early in June and celebrated at home in the North Island.

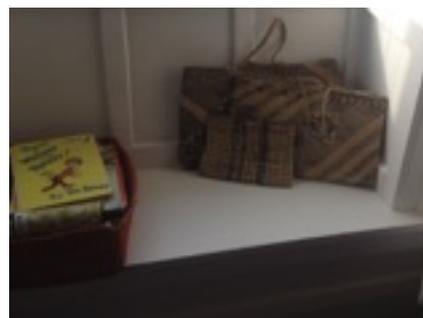
We have acquired some lamps to use for night-time counselling as the one central light bulb was far too harsh. We also have some snazzy new cushion covers for the sofa. Trademe is great!

There is now a "cultural corner" in our counselling room to demonstrate cultural safety in case any Maori clients ever come (see illustrations). This is apparently a desirable accessory according to the Social Worker's Registration Board.

The Church is going to conduct a bit of a spruce-up on Church House, which we are looking forward to.



Our staff, clockwise from top left: Leith, Olivia, Julie, and Anna



Leith's Cultural Corner

Social evenings

Our regular social evenings are on the first and the third Wednesday of the month, at a venue near Church Corner at 7:30pm. (Please contact Leith for the exact location). We have board games, hot drinks and biscuits, and a selection of books from the Aspiehelp library available at every meeting. Please bring a \$2 donation.

The next meetings are June 21st and July 5th.
You are welcome to attend. (New members should contact Leith or Julie first.)

Women's group

Our Aspiehelp women's group meets fortnightly on Tuesdays at 2pm.
A get-together for autistic-spectrum women and women living with aspie family.
The next meetings are on June 20th and July 4th.
Please contact us if you're interested in attending.

Our Patron is Stephen Mark Shore, PhD.

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People with autism can hear more than most – which can be a strength and a challenge

A noisy environment can be hell for a person with autism. On the plus side, they are more likely to have perfect pitch than a non-autistic person.

A group of friends are sitting in the garden chatting – only one person hears the ice cream van in the distance. That one person is autistic. He is also able to hear the buzzing of electricity in the walls and sometimes finds it overwhelming to be in a very noisy environment.



Our most recent work, published in *Cognition*, the international journal of cognitive science, suggests why that might be the case: people on the autistic spectrum can take in more sounds at any given moment compared with non-autistic people.

Over the past few years, there has been growing awareness that sensory experiences are different in autism. What is also becoming clear, however, is that different doesn't mean worse. There are many reports of autistic people doing better than non-autistic people on visual and auditory tasks. For example, compared with non-autistic people, autistic individuals spotted more continuity errors in videos and are much more likely to have perfect pitch.



Do you have perfect pitch?

We suggest that the reason behind this is that autistic people have a higher perceptual capacity, which means that they are able to process more information at once. Having this extra processing space would be useful in some situations but problematic in others.

For example, when copying a complicated drawing you need to take in lots of information as efficiently as possible. On the other hand, if you don't need much information to perform a task (such as when having a conversation with someone) then the extra capacity automatically processes other things in the room. This can distract you from what you are trying to do, or make you feel overwhelmed by lots of different sensory stimuli.

A sound advantage

To test out this idea, we asked a group of autistic and non-autistic adults to carry out two computer-based tasks.

The first was a listening-search task where having greater perceptual capacity would be useful and help you perform well. Participants were asked to listen to short bursts of animal sounds, played simultaneously, and figure out whether there was a dog's bark or a lion's roar in the

group. At the same time, they also had to listen for the sound of a car, which was there in half the trials.

The autistic adults were much better than the non-autistic adults at picking out the car sound at the same time as doing the animal task correctly.

The second task involved listening to a recording of a group of people preparing for a party and focusing on the women's conversation to be able to answer questions about it at the end. In this case, the task was easy and having extra capacity might leave you at risk of being more easily distracted by information that isn't needed for the task.



To see if that was the case, an unexpected and unusual addition was made to the middle of the scene: a man walked in saying, "I'm a gorilla," over and over again. As predicted, many more of the autistic participants (47 per cent) noticed the "gorilla man", compared with 12 per cent of the non-autistic group.

So it seems that increased capacity for processing sounds in autism could be linked to both difficulties and enhanced auditory abilities that are found in the condition.

Changing perceptions

Understanding that differences in autistic attention might be due to this extra capacity, rather than an inability to filter out irrelevant information, can change the way we understand the condition and how we might intervene to help those who are struggling.

Our findings suggest that to reduce unwanted distraction, autistic people need to fill their extra capacity with information that won't interfere with the task at hand. For example, it might be helpful to listen to music while reading. This challenges the common approach taken to simplify the classroom environment for autistic children, although care should still be taken to avoid a sensory overload.

While we must not downplay the challenges associated with autism, our study raises awareness of a more positive side to the condition. By promoting evidence of autistic strengths, we embrace diversity and undermine the traditional view that autism is only associated with deficits.

Anna Remington is a senior lecturer in Cognitive Science at UCL. This article first appeared on The Conversation (theconversation.com)

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/people-with-autism-can-hear-more-than-most-which-can-be-a-strength-and-a-challenge-a7715266.html>

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