



Aspiehelp / The Aspire Trust

September 2016 Newsletter

Edited by Hazel Shanks

In this newsletter: We've got funding!, new books in the library, In Our Office, and Jeanette Purkis reports back from the Victoria Autism Conference and how it relates to Neurodiversity.

Funding Received for Aspiehelp

Aspiehelp has received grants from the Rātā Foundation (operating expenses) the Mainland Trust (rent), securing our ability to provide services well into 2017. We also received a small grant from the City Council (purchase of heaters).

These grants are not just the financial lifeblood that keeps us running; they're also a clear show of support for the work that we do — a big vote of confidence in our team and our organisation.

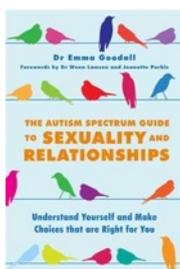
Aspiehelp is unique in that we're a peer support organisation focused on helping aspies of all ages. The work we do is important yet falls outside the scope of other autism charities.

We are extremely thankful to both the Rātā Foundation and also the Mainland Foundation for supporting us. If you'd like to join the ranks of our benevolent and wise funders, please make a donation to The Aspire Trust.



Our funders, who gave us vital grants this month

New Books in the Aspiehelp Library

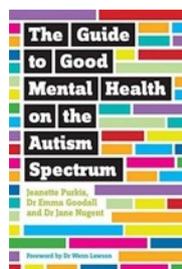


The Autism Spectrum Guide to Sexuality and Relationships.

Dr. Emma Goodall

An informative, honest, and non-judgemental guide for adults on the autism spectrum to the complexities of sexuality and relationships.

Expert advice and real-life examples help you reflect on your sexuality, and decide what kind of relationship is right for you.



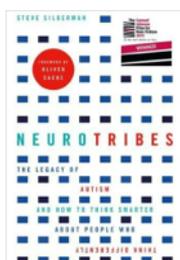
The Guide to Good Mental Health on the Autism Spectrum.

Jeanette Purkis, Dr. Emma Goodall, and Dr. Jane Nugent

This informative book looks at common mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety.

As well, guidance is provided on strategies for self-help, as the authors introduce strategies to improve your wellbeing.

(These two were generously donated by Jeanette Purkis and Emma Goodall, who authored these books. Thanks to both Emma and Jeanette for your support)



Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism, and how to think about people who think differently.

Steve Silberman

This best-selling history of autism shows how our understanding of it has changed over time, investigating how attitudes during the discovery of autism have had significant influence — and reveals how things are changing with the developing Neurodiversity movement.

In Our Office

It has been another busy month in our office. We've had a large focus this month on employment and assisting our clients to find work and to work with employment agencies.

We had a wonderful visit to Kilmarnock Enterprises where we had a full tour of their workplace and all the contracts they are involved in. The atmosphere of professionalism and warmth of the staff was evident. We feel as though we have opened some doors and gained some professional colleagues. Also took a client with us to visit them in the hopes of helping them into employment.

We also accompanied a client to Catapult Employment Services where we learned much more about their workings.

Our regular Women's group has met three times now and lively discussions have ensued.



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

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 every meeting.

The next two meetings are on the 7th and the 21st of September.

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 two meetings are the 13th and 27th of September.

Contact us if you're interested in attending.

Our Patron is Stephen Mark Shore, PhD.

The Aspire Trust, Inc is a registered Charitable Trust. Charities Services registration number is CC46192.

phone (03) 337-6337 or email info@aspiehelp.com
support us at givealittle.co.nz/org/myaspiehelp
www.aspiehelp.com

Supported by:



THE LION
FOUNDATION



Rātā
Foundation



Destination Neurodiversity

by Jeanette Purkis — 3rd Sept 2016

I just spent two days speaking at the Victorian Autism Conference in Melbourne. It was a great experience. I spoke in a break-out session on mental health and Autism on Thursday and gave one of the keynote presentations, about resilience, on Friday morning. I usually enjoy these sorts of things both because I love sharing my knowledge with others and I am an extrovert who gets a lot of energy from standing up in front of an audience. Unfortunately many events I have attended in the past focussed on Autism have in fact been quite poor in terms of encouraging and supporting Autistic people to attend and including Autistic perspectives within the program.

I go to a lot of these sorts of events. This one was a little different to others I have been involved with – actually quite a lot different. The organisers – Amaze / Autism Victoria – intended this conference to be inclusive and based on the understanding of neurodiversity. They had one international speaker, Steve Silberman, author of ‘Neurotribes’ – a book which has a strong focus on the neurodiversity movement. I had dinner with Steve and some of the other speakers and we had some very interesting conversations. I really enjoyed talking to Steve and he seemed so attuned with the sorts of issues which are dear to my heart as an Autistic advocate.

This week’s conference was noticeably different to most of the ones I have attended in the past. There were considerations and measures to address sensory issues, a large proportion of the speakers – I think around half – were Autistic. Some of my Autistic friends were involved in planning the event and their thoughts and concerns seemed to have largely been taken on board. There was no discussion of ‘cures’ or ‘Autism epidemics.’ When I arrived and went to register, one of the events company staff saw me and gave me my lanyard meaning I didn’t have to queue. There was an app with the program and useful information on it rather than one of those sad little bags you usually get at conferences. This was awesome. I hate the conference bags you get because I don’t look at the contents and then struggle with my environmental wishes to not waste stuff and throw anything potentially useful out and the sheer ugliness of the conference bags.

I left at the end of the first keynote and spent the ten minutes the speaker was taking questions by myself in the quiet room. I wasn’t overloaded but as I have more of a profile these days, I often find the breaks a bit overwhelming, with people coming up to me all the time. One of the Amaze staff saw me and asked if I was OK. I assured her I was and then I was alone for a glorious fifteen minutes, after which I could go and do my thing and talk to others.

There were some issues but many of these seemed to be around the venue rather than oversights or omissions on the part of the conference organiser. It was not a perfect conference from a neurodiversity perspective but the intent was clear and I for one really appreciated it and think it was far superior to many Autism conferences I have attended in the past.

This takes me into some interesting territory. As an Autistic adult, author and speaker I go to many Autism events, most of them organised by Autism organisations who provide services to Autistic children or adults and our families and supporters. It seems odd that I have been speaking publicly about Autism for eleven years but it is only now we are getting an event – and hopefully more events in the future – focussed around neurodiversity and trying to be accessible and inclusive of Autistic people – you know, the people the conferences are about!

continued on page 4

continued from page 3

I am 42. This means that the Asperger's diagnosis was first available in Australia when I was 19 – and I had been through school and all the hell it entailed. I was an undiagnosed Autistic girl in a school system which had no infrastructure to support me even if I had a diagnosis. I went through my twenties being abused and attacked and misdiagnosed with extremely unhelpful mental illness conditions which I didn't have. I finally accessed assistance with an Autism-specific organisation when I was 28, signing up with an employment service for Autistics which no longer exists but which had a very paternalistic attitude to the clients who essentially paid its bills.

I feel that all the things I achieved – a Masters degree and professional job – resulted mostly from my determination, strength and resilience with very little assistance from any Autism organisations. The best help I got from another source was Autistic author Donna Williams mentoring me and supporting me through writing and publishing my autobiography. Since then a lot of the assistance I've had – both personal and professional – has come from other Autistic people

I get to this point in my life – and to the point in the life of the Neurodiversity movement – and wonder where things will go. The relationships between Autistics and services assisting us do seem to be becoming less based on 'them and us' and more collegiate but I think this will be an ongoing journey requiring goodwill and respect.

On a personal note, I find the 'them and us' things – the organisations which tolerate or condone abuse, the organisations like the one which offered me a speaking opportunity but stated they could not pay me anything, not even my airfare and accommodation, because they were paying a non-autistic keynote several thousand dollars and had no funds left for me. I don't want the crumbs that fall from the table – I want the whole enchilada, inclusion and respect-wise! In order to get this, I think we, as advocates, need to educate and support many Autism organisations to come on that journey too, although there can be a grey area. I often speak and write for organisations which I don't think are 100 per cent 'kosher', mostly because the audience tends to be educators, parents and others who support and work with Autistics and I would rather they got their message about Autistic knowledge and experience from me or a fellow self-advocate than from some clinician who seemed to stop learning about Autism in 1997. In fact, I often find that through being involved with organisations during the planning stage of talks, I get a chance to change thinking with the organisers as well. It should be noted though that some things do not need gentle education and support to change attitudes, they need immediate action and sanctions. This refers to activities which are abusive to Autistic people.

“I think we are living in what may be a very exciting time. Steve Silberman was interviewed on the ABC News Breakfast yesterday and he described the Neurodiversity movement as being the civil rights movement of our time”

I think we are living in what may be a very exciting time. Steve Silberman was interviewed on the ABC News Breakfast yesterday and he described the Neurodiversity movement as being the civil rights movement of our time. Hopefully my Autistic advocate colleagues, Ally colleagues and I will be making sure nobody has to 'sit at the back of the bus' and we can take our place in the world as we deserve to.