



Aspiehelp / The Aspire Trust

February 2018 Newsletter

Edited by Anna Melling

Death of Jason McDonnell, Social Night Changes, AGM report, Sausage Sizzles, Feedback Requested, In Our Office, "How Can You Not Hear That" article by Jeanette Purkis

Sad News - death of Jason McDonnell

Jason McDonnell, a current member, died suddenly on the 29th of January. Julie and Leith attended the funeral. It was a wonderful celebration of his life, and those attending clearly felt strongly for him.

Paul McDonnell, Jason's Father, asked for donations to come to us in lieu of flowers. This money will be set aside in a special fund in his memory.

Social Night Changes

Another change to our social nights.

We will now be holding these social nights in our counselling rooms in Cashmere.

The time is 7pm - 9pm.

There are board games, drinks and biscuits. Please bring a donation of \$2 or more.

The next social nights are Wednesday the 7th and the 21st of March. They will continue on the first and third Wednesdays of each month.

Annual General Meeting

Our AGM went well. Peter Brittenden, Dean Sutherland, Kim Lawlor and Elizabeth Woods were re-elected to the board unanimously.

Those attending enjoyed "road-testing" the new game "Tsuro".

Upcoming Fundraising Sausage Sizzles

Here are the dates for the upcoming Sausage Sizzles at Fresh Meats Barrington (Barrington Mall):

Saturday the 31st of March

Saturday the 28th of April

Saturday the 12th of May

Saturday the 26th of May

If you're in the area, come and visit, say hello and perhaps buy a sausage! We are always grateful for volunteers to help out with the sausage sizzles, even 2 hours now and then is very helpful (contact the office in advance if you want to help out)

Feedback about Psych Med

We are interested to know people's experiences with Psych Med, Christchurch. If you have had experience with this organisation, could you let us know how that went? info@aspiehelp.com

In Our Office

Julie and Leith have been very busy with some very complex problems.

We calculate that the ratio of “thinking time” to the interview time is about 10 hours to 1 hour!

Leith picked up a cheerful yellow lantern to hang in the counselling room. It is very festive, right in time for Chinese New Year.

We have acquired some new board games for use at our Social Night - Tsuru, a board game where players lay tiles and try to be the last remaining player on the board, and Coup, a short card game of deception and trickery!



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



Tsuru



Coup



Our new lantern

Social evenings

Our regular social evenings are on the first and the third Wednesday of the month, in Cashmere from 7pm - 9pm.

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 on the 7th and 21st of March.

Aspiring members should make an appointment to meet Julie and Leith first.

Conversation group

Our Conversation Group is temporarily on hold.

Our Patron is Stephen Mark Shore, PhD.

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'How can you not hear that?'

communicating sensory difficulties

Jeanette Purkis

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I'm not sure if this is the case for anyone else but the older I get, the worse my sensory sensitivities are. I used to be able to eat almost anything and it all tasted good and had a texture which didn't revolt me. Now I am anxious about going to restaurants in case they have nothing I can happily eat. I eat exactly the same dish every night unless I get take away, in which case I usually order the same dish! (Except for pizza. I think it's pretty hard to make pizza horrible). To the horror of my vegetarian, vegan and health conscious friends, the things I am able to eat mostly come from the meat group or the sugar group! I am only 42 so worry that if I get old I might only have one thing I can eat!

I also have an increasingly heightened sense of smell. I have always had an acute sense of smell but it is getting ridiculous. The MC at the event I spoke at yesterday was running around all day and was evidently concerned he might be a bit stinky. I watched in horror as he liberally squirted himself with some foul deodorant thing. It permeated the room for hours! And public toilets are possibly my least favourite place at the moment. I work in a big office building and going to the bathroom can be a disturbing and overwhelming experience. It's not that my colleagues are gross. They aren't at all – it's that my smell is incredibly sensitive so any unpleasant smell is magnified beyond normal levels.

And the one I have not experienced much before but which I find I get quote a lot these days is a variety of auditory sensitivities. The sounds of construction work are the worst. That noise results in an almost murderous rage. I have to be somewhere else if construction is going on. I also hate water sounds indoors and any unidentified mechanical humming sounds. Sometimes I can feel a building trembling in time to some machinery sound. It's horrible.

I'm pretty certain my Autistic readers will all be reading this and thinking 'yup. Sensory stuff is nasty.' Although their sensitivities may be different to mine. Most Autistic people seem to have heightened senses. For some these can be pleasant but for many they are negative and can be highly upsetting.

I think one of the worst thing about sensory issues is the lack of understanding that the wider world has about them. For me, some sensory experiences are completely overwhelming and either cause furious anger or severe anxiety. When they are happening I find it almost impossible to concentrate on the things going on at the same time. If I am at work in a meeting and there are construction sounds nearby I will not be very attentive to the discussion in the meeting. It would probably look like I was not paying attention. I don't think anyone else would be thinking about the background noise. They may not even be aware of it but for me it is boring into my brain and making me want yell and swear and run away but none of those things are appropriate in the workplace. Of course I have a very supportive and lovely employer so if sensory issues were

impacting my performance at work I would feel very happy to tell my manager who would consult with me about the issue and we would work together to resolve it, But not everyone has that kind of workplace and some people are 'suffering in silence,' so to speak.

Imagine if you are a person who has not disclosed their Autism with their manager and a significant sensory issue comes up. You have to do something about it so you try to explain to your manager what the issue is. They have no frame of reference for what you are saying. It is a situation which is completely outside of their experience. That usually means that the person – no matter how kind or supportive they are – has very little way to understand your experience and empathise with you. They might ask something like 'You can hear the fluorescent lights buzzing? Have you been smoking weed or something?' That lack of understanding tends to lead to a lack of taking your concern seriously.

Another issue is explaining your need for the station to change to people who are themselves the cause of sensory issues – the neighbour who plays music with booming bass which drives you to distraction, for example. In a neighbour situation, it can be horrific. People have sold their houses over this sort of issue. In fact raising noise or other issues with neighbours can also result in conflict and blame which can compound one issue with another,

Remember that your experience is correct. Just because other people haven't experienced it does not invalidate it. Articulating what the issue is and thinking of some strategies to address it can be useful. For me, I often play music or the TV when I am at home and there are noises which upset me. If it is overwhelming and this is feasible, I will leave the house. The toilet situation at work is beyond my powers to fix – you can't really ask people to stop going to the toilet! I tell myself I have to go there and that I will only be in the cubicle for a little while, which doesn't address the experience but which helps me to cope better. With the food sensitivities, I look at the menu of a restaurant I am going to online the day before and research any ingredients or processes I haven't come across. Then I know what to order and am much less anxious. But this stuff is really difficult. I would like to see more information for non-autistic people about sensory issues and what they mean to people experiencing them.

