

# Aspiehelp / The Aspire Trust

# November/December

# 2017 Newsletter

Edited by Anna Melling

**In this newsletter:** Round-Up Report, Olivia left Aspiehelp, Pub Charities grant for books, End of year BBQ, Notice of AGM, Leith's Award, Article from The Conversation on coping mechanisms

## Report: The Aspie Round Up

After many anxious months of planning and preparing (by Olivia Stacy and Dean Sutherland) and last minute reminders for the University Disability Resources Services, who were co-hosts, enabling us to use University facilities.

Approximately 30 people in total attended, and it was a lovely, friendly ambience.

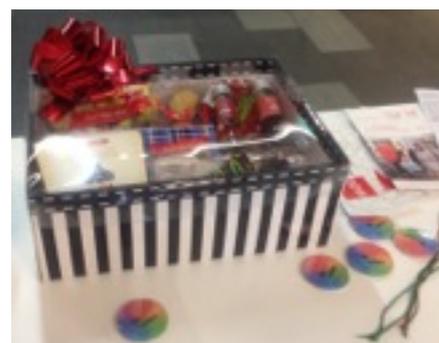
We had a programme of talks followed by Q and A, with plenty of time for everyone. The most appreciated ones were face-to-face as opposed to powerpoint or video. The parents' panel was probably the best appreciated, followed by Michael Woods' short movie, "The Parcel", and Rod Wintour talking about his amazing life journey.

We had a selection of books for sale and excellent goodie bags, prepared by Su McCann. Catering was ably done by Julie McGeorge, aided by volunteers when needed. Silvia Purdie, from Cashmere Presbyterian Church came especially to help with the washing up and clearing out of the room we used- much appreciated!

Peter Brittenden, our Chairman, opened and closed the two day event, and our Patron, Stephen Shore, led off the first day on his video "we need to talk about Autism". Jeanette Purkis from Australia sent a video about the advantages of employment and how to work towards being employed.

Julie and Leith talked about the creation and development of Aspiehelp. Two people attended from the North Island, and two "old hands" from early days came as well, lovely to see them again!

Many wishes were expressed for another Roundup next year and we will certainly be working on that from the start of the New Year (15 January)



*The Raffle Prize on the goodies table*



*Rod Wintour's talk*

## In Our Office

This month, apart from the excitement of preparing for the Aspie Roundup, we were thrilled to meet Margaux Sabourin from Lyon, in France. She is touring different countries to see how Autism Spectrum conditions are served, in contrast to France, where “treatment” is very patchy and positively medieval in places. She is touring in her role as a new Manager of Autism Services in France, paid for as part of her job. Margaux already has a Law degree and brings an intelligent and open mind to her discoveries.



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

We talked and were also filmed. Margaux gave us to understand that Aspiehelp are world leaders. High praise!

Leith has turned the corner of three score years and ten and a late birthday-cum-early Christmas BBQ lunch will be held at her house on Sunday 17th December. (See note elsewhere in this newsletter)

Julie did herself an horrific injury at her other workplace, burning both arms with scalding water. She has recovered amazingly quickly, thanks to good medical attention and Vitamin E cream.

### Social evenings

Our Social Evenings have been cancelled for the remainder of 2017, due to the library being declared an earthquake risk. We will advise of a new location early in 2018

### Conversation group

Our Conversation Group is temporarily on hold, until next year.

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#### Our Patron is Stephen Mark Shore, PhD.

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## Olivia has left Aspiehelp

We are sad to announce that Olivia has left Aspiehelp. She has done a lot of helpful and varied work for the organisation in the time she was here. Officially a Social Work Intern, she also branched out to do much of the planning for the Aspie Round Up, and showing her baking talents with the World Autism Awareness Day Cake she made earlier in the year.

We will miss her in the office, and we wish her all the best for her future endeavours.



## Pub Charity grant for Books

Pub Charity have given us a grant of \$2,000 for books for our library.

We should be able to expand our available books quite considerably, thanks to this generous amount.

If anyone has any ideas or requests for books we should purchase, feel free to suggest these to us on [info@aspiehelp.com](mailto:info@aspiehelp.com)



## End of year BBQ

The end of year BBQ lunch will be held at Leith's (Unit D/8 Hillsborough Tce, St. Martins) on Sunday 17th December at 12:00.

Please bring something (not bags of chips!) - salads (ready made) or ingredients, fizzy drinks or juice, light ales etc. Please park on the street outside, as it is a shared driveway.

## Annual General Meeting

We will be holding our Annual General Meeting on Thursday the 14th of December, at 12:00 noon. This will be held in our offices at 2a MacMillan Ave, Cashmere (the white building next to Cashmere Presbyterian, there will be a flag at the road, and an arrow down the path to point to our entrance).

Everyone is welcome to attend.

## Leith's Award

Leith received an exciting letter from Lianne Dalziel herself. The Christchurch City Council is honouring Leith with a Christchurch Civic Award 2017 for service to the city and the people of Christchurch!

## Book Excerpt

'Sex, sexuality and the Autism Spectrum' - Wendy Lawson

### **ASD: My Gender**

My gender and I are a package.  
We come as part of the deal.  
'But ASD shows far more damage.  
Look at the things that you feel.'

I cannot account for these feelings,  
Emotions intense and extreme.  
But my issues with everyday dealings  
Can cause me to rant, shout and scream.  
I don't desire the 'make-up'.  
Fashion and high-heels don't appeal.  
I don't like perfume or my hair cut,  
But the need for 'understanding' is real.

The expectations placed upon me  
Being female and all,  
Push me further into pain and grief,  
With my back against the wall.

'I cannot multi-task,' I say.  
'But you must, You're a woman. You can.'  
You must cook, clean, organise and play  
The role that supports your man.'

'Your children and men depend on you,  
You must be strong, in control and sure.'  
'What if these things I cannot do?  
What if my timing is poor?'

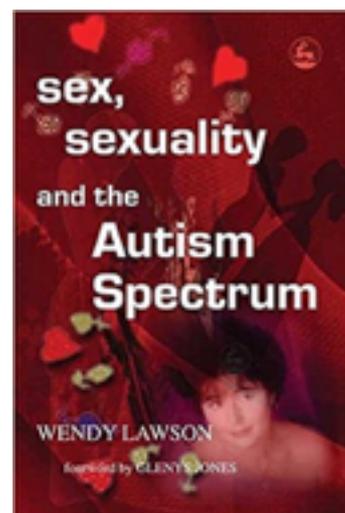
'You must work harder, try harder to be,  
What society says and dictates.'  
'But both my ASD and gender are me, you see  
They both influence my states.'

As a woman I function differently.  
As a woman I think, see and feel.  
As a woman I value *all* that is me.  
My ASD is part of the deal.

## Quote Corner

"It seems that for success in science or art,  
a dash of autism is essential"

- **Hans Asperger**



# How coping mechanisms allow autistic people to manage their condition

In a recent documentary, naturalist and wildlife presenter, Chris Packham, talked about having Asperger's Syndrome, a form of autism. It was a rare snapshot into the life of an adult with Asperger's – and especially so as Packham only realised this in his 40s. Packham said he “spent 30 years on the telly trying [his] best to act normal”.

Though some of Packham's experiences may have come as a surprise to viewers – who may have been expecting a “social outsider”, not an award-winning television presenter with a long-term girlfriend – they fit with new research on how some people with autism use their psychological strengths and special interests to manage their difficulties in social situations.

People with autism have difficulties socialising and communicating with other people. They also have restricted behaviours – sticking to strict routines or following rituals – and special interests, which can lead to extensive knowledge about a particular topic.

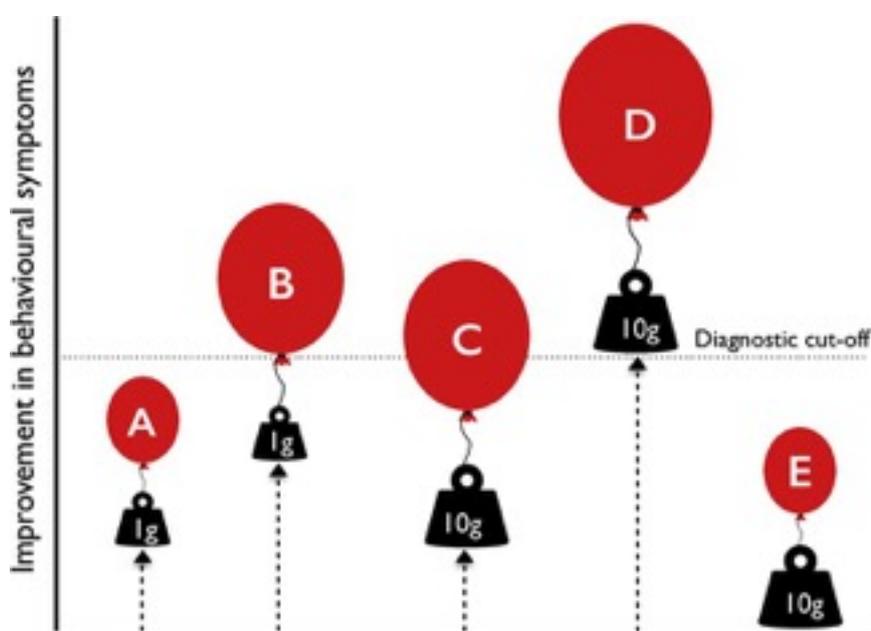
In the film, Packham described how his own special interests helped him become a wildlife expert: “I had something that my peers didn't ... a vast encyclopedic knowledge of the natural world.” He also described making mental lists about things he should and shouldn't say in social situations at work.

Autistic people, like Packham, develop these compensatory strategies to cope with their difficulties. They can use non-social skills, such as their attention to detail, logical thinking, and the aforementioned special interests, to help them deal with social situations and jobs that involve other people.

This process has been described in a new theory on autism that explains how autistic people can develop compensatory strategies to deal with things that might not come naturally to them.

## How compensating works

Take a look at these balloons, which represent five different autistic people:



The weights represent the psychological struggles (for example, trouble understanding people) that “weigh down” autistic people, leading to more symptoms. The balloons represent the compensatory strategies that “lift them up”, and reduce their symptoms helping them to manage their condition.

This theory helps to explain why autistic people can be so different from each other. Some autistic people, like the person represented by balloon E, have many psychological difficulties but few compensatory strategies leading to more autistic symptoms. Other people with autism, like D, might have so many strategies they no longer reach the diagnostic criteria for autism. So although compensatory strategies might be useful, if they prevent a person being diagnosed, it may mean they don't get the help they need. Compensating can make it difficult for others to notice that someone is autistic, which might explain why some people, like Packham, are not diagnosed until adulthood.

Another challenge is that compensatory strategies involve mental effort. This can take a lot of energy, and sometimes leads to health problems such as stress and anxiety. Packham describes this experience in the film, saying, “[my strategies] were exhausting and I would get upset with myself when they were failing”. This means that autistic people who compensate well for their psychological difficulties might need other kinds of support, particularly when dealing with the mental effort needed to get by in social situations.

If autistic people are helped to use their psychological strengths – in schools, universities and the workplace – they may be able to cope well in these settings. There are schemes to help autistic people move from school to higher education, and they can sometimes get ongoing support at university. There is also a small but growing set of companies actively seeking the psychological skills of people with autism.

Autistic people can offer a unique perspective and often enjoy doing difficult technical jobs because of their good attention to detail. But this is just the beginning, we need more of these schemes to help older adults with autism cope with the pressures they face in every day life.

More research into compensatory strategies in autism is needed too. We are keen to hear from autistic people about how they deal with social situations to learn more about the condition. This research could feed into new and existing support schemes, so that more autistic people are able to reach their full potential, just like Packham.

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**THE CONVERSATION**

<https://theconversation.com/how-coping-mechanisms-allow-autistic-people-to-manage-their-condition-85932>



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