

**ACCEPTED PAPERS – THEME GROUPS**  
**Biennial Australian Autism Conference**

*Autism Spectrum: Pathways To Understanding*

Rydges Lakeside, Canberra  
Friday, 1 October - Sunday, 3 October, 2004

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## The Revised Australian Scale for Asperger’s Syndrome

*Michelle Garnett and Tony Attwood*

This paper will explain the new revised edition of the Australian Scale for Asperger’s Syndrome and discuss the preliminary results of an evaluation study of the ASAS-R. The new questionnaire comprises over 150 items that assess eight areas of functioning, namely abilities in social, emotional, communication, cognitive and motor skills, special interests, routines, sensory sensitivity as well as measuring the effects of the profile of abilities on the child or adolescents daily living skills. The ASAS-R is designed for parents and educators to screen for children who may have a diagnosis of Asperger’s syndrome and for clinicians in a diagnostic assessment. This new questionnaire may also be used to measure change over time and any changes in the signs of Asperger’s syndrome due to the effects of specific intervention programs. The presentation will include information on the administration of the ASAS-R to several hundred parents and the use of the ASAS-R in clinical practice.

## The WEAP approach: “Best practice” and effective strategies for teaching social skills and integration

*Glen Sallows - WEAP*

In 1994 WEAP became one of several worldwide research projects that were set up to replicate the original findings of Dr. Lovaas in his groundbreaking work with young children who have autism. WEAP is the first of these projects to achieve the same proportion of “best outcome” children as the original study.

Dr. Sallows will describe his treatment approach, including examples of “best practice”, and effective strategies for teaching social skills and integration with typically developing peers. He will also present WEAP’s latest research findings which have been submitted for publication to *The Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*.

### Biography

Glen Sallows, Ph.D. is the Director of both the Wisconsin Early Autism Project (WEAP) and the Early Autism Project in Sydney. He has been working in the field of autism for over 20 years. Dr. Sallows trained under Dr. Ivar Lovaas at the University of California, Los Angeles becoming proficient in using techniques known as Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA), otherwise known as “The Lovaas Programme”.

## Joint attention: Using imitation as a facilitator

*Chris Kilham*

Many children with autism have difficulties in social interaction and understanding. One explanation for this uses the concept of joint attention. This is a set of protodeclarative or sharing skills that direct another's attention in order to share the experience of an object or event (not simply to obtain a desired item), using gestures and eye gaze. It appears around the first birthday of typically developing children, but is delayed in children on the spectrum.

This research uses videotape analysis to suggest how the careful use of imitation can encourage these children to be more socially responsive and jointly attend to their surroundings.

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## Autism/ASD diagnosis rates in Australia

*Bob Buckley*

This paper collects together reports of the number of people with an autism/ASD diagnosis in various parts of the country. This data is sometimes described as prevalence data and incidence data. The different types of data cannot be compared directly.

The detailed age distribution of diagnoses provides the means to calculate a ratio of the ASD diagnosis rate relative to the birth rate for a region. This metric estimates the number of people in the population who have ASD. The current diagnosis rates in all regions of the country suggest that around 1% of Australians will be diagnosed with an ASD. ASD is a life-long and can be severely disabling so this level ASD imposes a substantial burden on the community.

The age distribution of diagnoses can be further used to estimate for planning purposes the number of children with an ASD diagnosis (including Asperger's Syndrome/Disorder) at important transitions, such as the number of children with an ASD diagnosis entering primary or secondary school.

## Life Events and Stress in Adults with Autism

*David Hamilton, Georgina Sutherland, & Teresa Iacono*

Précis: This paper examines the impact of recent life events on emotional problem in adults with autism and other developmental disabilities. A cohort of adults with developmental, disabilities (n = 615), which included people with autism (n = 94), were surveyed using the Developmental Behaviour Checklist for Adults (DBC-A), completed through proxy respondents. DBC-A scores were generally higher for the group with autism, but were predicted for all groups by the frequency of significant life events occurring during the previous two years. Results are discussed with reference to possible determinants of emotional problems in people with autism.

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## Couples, Intimacy and Sexuality

*Isabelle Hénault*

This presentation examines the intimate relationships of couples affected by Asperger's Syndrome (AS). Numerous couple issues are raised when we consider the relationship between an individual with AS and a neurotypical partner. Other reflections can be made from examining the relationship between two individuals with AS. In a couple, the expression of traits and behaviours linked to AS vary according to several factors such as prior experiences, self-disclosure, acceptance of the syndrome, quality of communication, family situation, mutual support, partner motivation, and many more. The presentation will explore issues such as intimacy, empathy, sexual desire, commitment, and couple therapy. Finally, reflections made by individuals with AS on the topics of couples and sexuality will be addressed:

1. Intimacy
2. Sexual desire
3. Affective communication
4. Couple dynamics
5. Empathy
6. Sexual intimacy
7. Reflections from adults with Asperger's syndrome.

## ASD Families: Who Cares For The Carers?

*Judy Brewer Fischer*

Are we “carers”? If so, why have autism families had so little connection with carer networks and formal associations?

This session will outline what it means to be a family carer and what assistance is available to carers in Australia today. It will identify the key issues facing carers and the barriers to receiving the services and support they need, as well as report on the work of the national family carers voice (NFCV).

the NCFV is a recent initiative of the federal minister for family and community services, it was set up to plan a way forward in better meeting the needs of those in the community who find themselves willingly, or unwillingly, in the family carer role.

## Watching the Career Challenges for a Police Woman on the Autistic Spectrum

*Deborah Locke*

My recently published book “Watching the Detectives” ABC Books- details my life and career in the NSW Police exposing corruption leading to the Wood Royal Commission and massive police reform. Diagnosed with high functioning Autism I illustrate the conflict between expressed and implied rules of behaviour which an ASD person encounters in an organization where culture is not black and white. Discretion required on a daily basis can be a difficult concept. I am an experience and entertaining public speaker having presented at numerous Universities and conferences.

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## Travelling with autism

*Helen Neale*

As a mother of two children, one who is a 6 year old with Autism, and as an experienced travel consultant, it is my aim to offer suggestions, techniques and hope for those who want to undertake travelling with an autistic family member. It is my belief (and first hand experience) that travelling can still be a wonderful family event, and can benefit the autistic person and the whole family in a way no other experience can.

I will discuss vital steps of planning, preparation, and things to consider before, during and after the trip.

## Supporting People with Autism and High Support Needs in Community Group Homes

*Michele Thomas*

This paper examines:

- The need for routine, predictability and choice within the group home setting
- The characteristics of supervisory and direct care staff that enable them to best meet the needs of people with autism
- The model of clinical input we have found to be most effective
- The roster pattern we have found to be most successful
- Achievements made by people with high support needs within the group home setting.

## Making sense of autism: How impairments in sensory processing impact on Performance in children with an autism spectrum disorder

*Tasha Alach & Aaron Jackson*

It has long been recognized that children with an Autism Spectrum Disorder demonstrate impairments in sensory processing. Studies indicate that sensory related problems can affect a child's performance in a wide range of areas including activities of daily living, social participation, academic learning, motor skills, as well as significantly contributing to difficulties in behaviour.

This paper will present a review of the current literature as well as discussing new theories in relation to sensory processing and Autism Spectrum Disorders. The paper will also discuss ways of identifying impairments in sensory processing as well as exploring intervention strategies that may facilitate performance across environments in children with an autism spectrum disorder.

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## Practical Sensory Activities for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

*Sue Larkey*

This session is a practical workshop for educators who encounter the challenges of having a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder in their classroom and for families dealing with the everyday requirements of their child at home. Children with autism spectrum disorder have a range of sensory processing problems. They may seek or avoid sensory stimulation. They may be overly sensitive or very slow to register sensory input. This covers a range of sensory areas; touch (hot /cold, not liking touch, wearing limited clothes), taste (Limited food), smell, sight (eye contact), listening (appears not to hear) and movement. This workshop will help participants to:

- Understand the sensory processing difficulties children with ASD encounter.
- Identify sensory processing difficulties in students with ASD.
- Give guidelines on how to develop a desensitisation programs
- Incorporate sensory program into their current home / educational activities
- Evaluate the effectiveness of program.
- Develop positive behaviour support program using sensory activities.

## Social Communication Groups for Young Adults with Asperger's Disorder & Other Communication Disorders

*Noel Boycott & Jane Cotter*

This presentation will outline the social communication program for young adults with Asperger's and other communication difficulties, currently being run in Sydney by the Autism: Association of NSW. The presentation will also describe the setting up of a Social Club for young adults. The purpose of both programs is to provide further opportunities for social communication and contact into adulthood. During the presentation, participants can expect a summary of the history of the programs, as well as content and outcomes information. They can experience first hand some of the exercises used in the sessions.

These programs have been made possible by a number of generous sponsors: Myer Foundation, Mercy Foundation ING and Sisters of Charity; combined with 'user pays' and Autism Association of NSW funding.

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### **An Anxiety Management Program for Children with Asperger's Disorder and high Functioning Autism**

*Anne Chalfant, Louisa Carroll and Ron Rapee*

The notion that individuals who have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may be more susceptible to anxiety related difficulties than individuals who do not have an ASD has been strongly supported in psychological literature. However, despite the high prevalence rates of anxiety disorders in individuals with ASD, there is no published research concerning the development or implementation of anxiety management programs specifically for children with ASD's, as a separate population with special learning needs and a relatively higher susceptibility to manifest anxiety difficulties. The current paper reports on the -first formal study of a manualised, CBT based program for the treatment of anxiety disorders in children who have either Asperger's Disorder or High Functioning Autism. Results indicate that an adapted CBT based program is effective in treating anxiety within children 9-12 years old.

NB: Presenters will be Anne Chalfant and Louisa Carroll

### **Intensive intervention programs for individuals with Asperger Syndrome and challenging behaviours**

*Verity Bottroff & Joanna Zeitz*

This paper will report on the major findings from a 3 year research project which involved the development, implementation and evaluation of intensive intervention programs for children and adolescents with Asperger's syndrome and their families. Recommendations associated with a cohesive integrated service system approach to meet the individual needs of this client group will be presented. Progress towards achieving the recommendations will be discussed, including a new research project designed to reduce victimisation and bullying of students with Asperger syndrome within school communities.

### **Collaborative Partnerships - An Interdisciplinary Approach to Early Intervention for Children With An autism spectrum disorder**

*Laura Miller and Shannon Atkinson*

Autism has long been recognized as a pervasive disorder in which the child exhibits dysfunction in a number of skill areas. In addition, these specific skill deficits impact upon, and often impede, other areas of the child's functioning, compounding their difficulties.

Given the multifaceted impact of Autism on different areas of child development, the Autism Association has developed a trans-disciplinary model of intervention, using clinicians from a number of key specialist areas working collaboratively as a team. This paper will explore the strengths of this model in meeting the needs of the child, as well as providing support to the family. It will discuss how Intervention Plans are developed and evaluated within an interdisciplinary/trans-disciplinary team approach, and how it benefits the child. This paper will also review the highly individualized approach to meeting family need, not just for support, but also for skill development that allows parents to exercise to the fullest their role as partners with staff. In doing so, it will review some of the key strategies of this model e.g. parent counselling, training and education, one on one staff-parent teaching, paired-intervention, and the use of video filming as a tool for parent self-assessment.

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### **The Inclusion of Siblings to Promote Generalisation in Social Skills Training Groups for Boys with Asperger's Syndrome.**

*Lia Castorina*

The current investigation examined the effectiveness of including siblings in social skills training (SST) groups for boys with Asperger's Syndrome in an effort to promote generalisation of skills. Twenty two boys with Asperger's Syndrome were assigned to one of three conditions: those who participated in a SST group with a sibling; those who participated in the same program without a sibling; and those in a wait-list control group. Results suggest significant improvement of participants' social perception after the eight week program, and some evidence of generalisation of social skills with maintenance of treatment effects at three month follow up.

### **Transition to School a Big Step for both Child and Parents**

*Gay von Ess*

A change in ethos from family centred early intervention to child centred school.

Choosing a school. Mainstream / Support Class / Special School.

The transition program –visits to school. How many? How often? A transition book – what to include?

Pre-attendance interview with teacher. What information is valuable for the school to know?

Preparing the child – numerous issues beyond being able to manage his / her lunch box. These issues include things like school rules, who to go to if there is a problem on the playground, what does recess mean? The big day – how long to stay? Remind checklist for teachers.

### **First Links: Making Connections for Young Children with ASD and Their Families**

*Kathy Wilson and Deborah Maeder*

The First Links program is an innovative, intensive autism specific early intervention program developed by the Department of Education that provides individualized intervention for young children with ASD. The program commenced in 2001 and has a state-wide approach and provides family focused intervention within existing Early Learning Tasmanian centres. The aim of the First Links program are to facilitate family understanding and ability to engage their child in early communicative interactions, social play and interactions, and developmental play activities; to facilitate development in the child's skills in the above areas; to foster family understanding of the core elements of Autism and the consequences for assisting a young child's development; and to promote family understanding of behaviour and how to create positive changes. One to one intervention plus parent support and training are provided to participating families. The presentation will describe the origin, design, and implementation of the First Links Program. An outline of the preliminary evaluation following the two years of implementation will be presented. Video vignettes will be used to illustrate components of the program design.

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### **Autism in the classroom: The Perspective of a teacher who has Asperger syndrome.**

*Geraldine Robertson*

Parents and professionals are often curious about the possibility of a person with Asperger Syndrome having a successful career as a teacher. The answer is that I am in control of my environment. I am able to minimize stressors in order to function effectively. I will describe some of these strategies and explain how I share them with children, therefore assisting them to be proactive in communicating their needs appropriately.

In addition, peer support is vital in helping autistic children interact effectively within the classroom; therefore strategies for promoting a supportive environment will be described.

### **A Functional Curriculum – Learning for Life**

*Carolyn Collings*

In this paper I will present an overview of my experience of teaching low functioning children with Autism in a special school environment through an integrated functional curriculum.

I will present reasons why I believe that teaching through a functional curriculum develops personal independence, a sense of achievement and a feeling of positive self esteem.

### **Jake (Asperger Syndrome) is a voice for Anthony (non verbal ASD)**

*Val Gill & Ms Mary Thompson*

What is voiced by the student with Aspergers Syndrome about life's experiences, can also give Voice to the experiences of non-verbal students with ASD

We will share how these insights have enriched our understanding and capacity to program successfully for a range of students.

We will focus on the connection between communication and behaviour.

This presentation will be based on many years experience in developing educational programs for students across the spectrum.

### **Successful classroom practices in a high school setting**

*Anna Tullemans*

High school can be a difficult period in an adolescent's life. For those with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder it can be especially difficult. They feel more isolated and different from others as their peers move on to the next level of life experiences. This presentation will help tackle the issue of how to make these changes and transitions smoother and less difficult for these students. It will give guidelines and practical strategies that will help achieve success in implementing programs by applying a whole staff approach. It will also cover strategies that may be implemented by staff at all levels of the school community to gain the full benefits of having ASD students in their community.