

November 2010



**Introduction:** Hello readers! Welcome to our newsletter. This month's topic is about Autism Spectrum Disorder. In our travels with presenting disability awareness training we are aware that many people are confused about the different types of Autism. Next week is **'International Day of people with a disability'** held on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> December (happy birthday Deb!) and we have been requested to promote 2 events on the day - One is a series of events during the day at Federation Square and the other is an IT awareness session at the State Library of Victoria.

Any feedback or contributions are most welcome.

**Our news:** Happily, we have been run off our feet lately and are branching out into various other areas. We have recently been given the contract to train HACC providers and staff in the new Active Service Model which is rolling out across the State – more about that next newsletter. We have also been doing some 'Cultural Competence' training for customer service staff across the Grampians. Deb's background is very diverse and her knowledge of multicultural issues are very extensive – it seemed a natural fit also with disability as people with a disability also seek inclusive practices and equal access to services.

### **Other services:**

**'International Day of people with a disability'** (Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> December) events include: The Disability Sport & Recreation Festival - "Able and Active" will bring together a range of community organisations which focus on sport and recreation opportunities, equity and health issues for Victorian's with disability, in an exhibition-style, free public event. Proudly supported by the State Government Victoria, City of Melbourne and Federation Square, the festival is a unique, interactive event promoting healthy, physically active lifestyles through inclusive and accessible sport and recreation. The Festival includes an array of exciting events for you, your colleagues, friends and networks to attend. These include:

- Disability Sports Awards Breakfast (ticketed event), Zinc (6.45am-9.00am)
- Community Exhibition (featuring 29 organisation stalls and over 10 'come and try' activities), Federation Square forecourt areas (9.00am-2.00pm)
- 'Scoring the Equaliser' Mini-Conference, BMW Edge (10.00am-12.00pm) (registration online at <https://wsv.eventarc.com/1447>)
- Corporate Wheelchair Basketball Challenge, Federation Square forecourt (12.00pm-1.30pm)

There is also the opportunity to visit the State Government's Bar None Photographic Exhibition in The Atrium (all day), enjoy a variety of bands and DJ entertainment on the Main Stage from 11.00am-2.00pm, meet players from the Melbourne Vixens and Paralympic champions and receive a free showbag. For further information, please visit the Festival website at [www.dsrf.org.au](http://www.dsrf.org.au)

### **IT Enables: Life Choice Aspirations**

On 2nd December 2010 Vicnet and the State Library are hosting a three part event to celebrate International Day for People with Disability. <http://www.idpwd.com.au/Pages/default.aspx>

The theme of the day is to explore ways that technology can be used to benefit the lives of people with a disability.

- The public are invited to Experimedia between 10 and 2.30 to visit a variety of stalls and an exhibition of technology through time, take part in a story time using Video Relay interpreting (VRI), tour the Assistive Technology Room and watch a variety of media clips.
- Service providers and other bodies are invited to book in for a series of presentations between 9.15 and 5pm. Keynote speakers Include Graeme Innes Disability Commissioner for the Australian Human Rights Commission and Carol Cooke MS Ambassador. For more information visit the website at [www.vicnet.net.au/ictdwg](http://www.vicnet.net.au/ictdwg).
- During the day there will also be a “Hack attack” in the activities room, where participants will brainstorm possible solutions for new applications.

Vicnet is hosting the day on behalf of the ICT Disability Working Group  
<http://www.vicnet.net.au/component/content/article/1/33-the-ict-disability-working-group.html>

For further information contact **Gabrielle Foulis on [gfoulis@vicnet.net.au](mailto:gfoulis@vicnet.net.au) or 8664 7001.**

## **What is an Autism Spectrum Disorder?**

The way people think about autism has changed in recent years. It is best described as a group of disorders with a similar pattern of behaviour in three key areas - communication, social interaction and imaginative thought.

The currently favoured term is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), with the word 'spectrum' used because no two people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder are exactly alike.

As the term suggests, there is no one diagnosis. Rather there are several labels that place people at different points on the spectrum. At one end of the spectrum diagnostic labels such as "Asperger Syndrome" or "High Functioning Autism" and at the other end of the spectrum you will find labels such as "Autism" and "Classic Autism" which will generally come hand in hand with intellectual impairment.

People with ASD do not have the noise ‘filter’ that we take for granted – when we concentrate, we can block out external noise distractions – people with ASD have difficulty in noisy or distracting environments which can lead to behavioural outbursts.

**Autism** - the impairments in the social and communication areas are severe and sustained and present before the age of three years. The child is often anxious, has poor attention, responds unusually to many different stimuli and is observed as being 'different' from other children. Speech is delayed, or largely absent. A strong reliance on routine is apparent and the child can have a range of ritualistic behaviours such as toe walking, hand flapping and finger gazing.

**High Functioning Autism** is a loosely used term (not defined in the diagnostic criteria) to describe a child or adult who meets the criteria for a diagnosis of Autism, but is not as severely affected as the more classically autistic person.

**Asperger Syndrome** is also a high functioning form of Autism with severe and sustained social impairments but the impairments are not as severe in the language and communication area. Speech usually develops within the normal age range, but the ability to communicate effectively is impaired. The impairments seem more subtle in the very young child, and become more apparent as the child reaches preschool and school age. A person with Aspergers is usually in the normal intelligence range.

Children with Aspergers typically exhibit social awkwardness and an all-absorbing interest in specific topics. Signs and symptoms of Aspergers include displaying unusual nonverbal communication, such as lack of eye contact, few facial expressions, or awkward body postures

and gestures. They will appear not to understand, empathize with, or be sensitive to others' feelings and will have a hard time "reading" other people or understanding humour. Children with Aspergers crave consistency and routine and need to know what is coming, or you will simply create more challenging behaviours.

Some other famous people who are thought to have had the milder form of autism - called Asperger's Syndrome - are **Albert Einstein**, **Wolfgang Mozart** and **Pablo Picasso**. This certainly highlights how important it is to not limit the possibilities or potential of anyone.

For more information go to the Autism Australia website: [www.autismaustralia.org.au](http://www.autismaustralia.org.au)

Here are some success stories of autism.

**Dr. Temple Grandin** - She has also authored over 400 articles in both scientific journals and livestock periodicals on animal handling, welfare, and facility design. She is the author of "Thinking in Pictures", "Livestock Handling and Transport," "Genetics and the Behavior of Domestic Animals," and "Humane Livestock Handling." Her books "Animals in Translation" and "Animals Make Us Human" were both on the New York Times best seller list. "Animals Make Us Human" was also on the Canadian best seller list. Her life story has also been made into an HBO movie titled "Temple Grandin, starring Claire Danes." The movie shows her life as a teenager and how she started her career.

**Harry Engnell Jr** - He is autistic and has made his passion for making buttons into a full time business.

**Michelle Dawson** - She is an autistic woman and autistic rights activist.

**Lizzy Clark** - She is an actress with Asperger syndrome.

**Jerry Newport** - American author and mathematical savant with Asperger syndrome.

**Sue Rubin** - She is a non-verbal published autistic author and also had an Oscar nominated documentary while using facilitated communication called Autism is a World.

### **Businessman happy he hired the disabled**

By Danny Rose, AAP August 21, 2009, 2:32 am

A Danish businessman who runs a successful IT firm staffed only by people with autism says it's time to recognise the special skills of people with disabilities. Thorkil Sonne founded Specialisterne (English translation: Specialists) five years ago, and his team of consultants now make light work of some of the most detailed, time consuming and repetitive jobs in computer programming.

"I have 43 employees now with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and we serve customers like Cisco and CSC, and big Danish companies, for services like software testing, data entry and quality control," Mr Sonne told AAP. "It's all the tasks where you have to be very structural, you have to have very high precision ... These tasks are very well suited to our staff but not so motivating for people that are generalists."

By "generalists" Mr Sonne means people who don't have ASD, a brain development disorder often characterised by reduced social and communications skills. However, people with ASD can display a razor sharp focus and attention to detail, boosted memory recall and enhanced numerical skills. Specialisterne received a top honour in Denmark's IT awards last year and it charges market rates for its services.

### **DHS Call for Submissions: Autism State Plan, Behaviour Support Pilot**

The *Autism State Plan - Behaviour Support Pilot* seeks to enhance support for people with

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who have behaviours of concern. In particular, the pilot will test an innovative approach to supporting those people with ASD and their families whose high support needs are not currently being met by the existing disability service system.

The Department of Human Services, Disability Services invites suitably qualified and experienced organisations to lodge submissions for the delivery of the *Autism State Plan - Behaviour Support Pilot*. Submitting applicants will be required to demonstrate the skills, experience and capacity necessary to deliver high quality behaviour support to people with ASD based on a comprehensive understanding of ASD, positive behaviour support and family-centred practice.

To apply, please see details on the DPV website: [www.dpv.org.au](http://www.dpv.org.au)

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