

Produced by and for people with Asperger syndrome

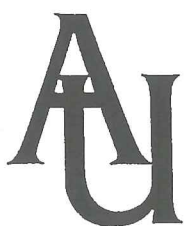
Asperger *united*

Edition 39 July 2004

We are all individuals



**Autism Awareness Week
17-24 May 2004**



The National
Autistic Society



Asperger United is a self-help newsletter run by and for people with Asperger syndrome. The newsletter aims to put people with the condition in touch with each other and to share information so that they can lead more independent lives.

Asperger United is free to people in the UK with a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome. We ask for a contribution of £6 per year from overseas readers and £10 from professionals and institutions to cover postage costs.

Editor John Joyce

Additional support The National Autistic Society's Publications Department

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Subscribing to *Asperger United*

Tel: 020 7903 3541
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All we need is your name and address and we will add you to the mailing list – free of charge to people with a diagnosis!

Thank you to George Cox who kindly produced the illustrations included in the Pen Pal Network section.
Thank you to Graeme Lawson for producing the *AU* logo.

Please note that the views expressed in Asperger United are not necessarily those of the editor, The National Autistic Society or those involved in the publication of the newsletter.

Contributions for the next issue should reach us by
20 August 2004

Asperger United was founded in 1993 by Pamela Yates and Patricia Howlin, in association with the Maudsley Hospital, and Mark Bebbington and Judy Lynch of The National Autistic Society.

This was in response to a recognised dearth of services for people with Asperger syndrome and the potential for self help and networking as a means of support for this group.

The provisions for editor's and sub-editor's post was to develop a publication that was truly the voice of the people it was aimed at. This post also provided the possibility of work experience and responsibility and has benefited those who have held the position. These are Richard Exley, David Wright, Martin Coppola, Ian Reynolds and the current editor, John Joyce.

Pamela Yates provided support and advice to the editors until the publication was handed over to The National Autistic Society in 2000.

The name *Asperger United* was chosen by the group of original readers as the most 'appropriate name' for the publication. This was suggested by Anna Cohen.

Dear readers

Hope all is well with you. I am well and getting accustomed to my new responsibilities at work.

Since the last edition, I have been given a temporary promotion which may last until my retirement early next year. My responsibility in my new post is to prepare explanatory statements summarising appeal cases. When an immigrant appeals against a decision to refuse him/her permission to stay in this country, I have to inspect the papers and prepare a summary which will be used by a colleague at the appeal hearing as the Home Office's defence of its decision.

I have a lot to look forward to as later this year I return to the Iberian Peninsula on an Open University Summer School in Santiago de

Compostela. I will let you know how this goes.

I hope you all find something of interest in this edition and we all have the opportunity of seeing your thoughts in print. Please continue to send us material for *AU*, especially artwork to use on our *AU* covers.

Please look at the flyer with this issue of *AU* as it gives important information regarding a forthcoming Asperger conference - maybe I'll see some of you there.

Many thanks to all contributors. Have a wonderful summer.

Your editor - John Joyce

in this edition

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What it means to me to have Asperger syndrome

I am in my mid 50s and all my life I felt I was different. I had difficulties in school and at 17 I left home and went to live abroad for 22 years. That was a disaster and I returned to England in 1989 from Australia, divorced and with three young children.

My son had been diagnosed at an early age as being hyperactive, ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and in later years as having Asperger syndrome (AS). He could not adapt to main-stream school and was sent to a special school for youngsters with behavioural problems. It did not really meet his needs and, after being statemented, it was decided his needs could best be met by a residential school near Manchester.

He now lives in Manchester on his own in a flat but unfortunately it appears at the present time he will find it difficult to obtain paid employment. Hopefully with the help and specialist support he is getting he should be able to obtain voluntary work.

My twin daughters lived with me and, as they were growing up, I decided I would like to work but by now computers were beginning to come onto the scene. As I had grown up pre-computers, I enrolled in various courses so I could learn the basics of using a computer. I found I enjoyed it and felt that it was something I would like to pursue in the work front, especially as I had a basic knowledge of administrative work and had learnt how to type.

I then started to apply for different jobs by filling in application forms or sending my CV but nothing resulted from it. I was lucky if I received a letter back thanking me for my application but saying that unfortunately I was not short-listed. However, most times I did not even receive a reply. Very occasionally I

was invited for an interview but it never resulted in a job. I did not understand why as I felt I had all the qualifications needed for the job. I did manage to gain some office work experience in the voluntary section.

I went on some training courses organised by the job centre where I learnt interview skills and how to write CV's etc. I even had a few interviews arranged for me but I did not succeed in obtaining paid employment. The organisers of the course felt I had all the qualifications necessary and that I appeared more suitable for the job than many of the applicants who were successful.

When it appeared that I was not getting anywhere with finding employment in the administrative field, my family suggested that I might be better off trying to find work in the field of care, especially looking after the elderly, as there was always a need for care assistants. I therefore decided to take an NVQ course in Care which I passed and which enabled me to find work as a care assistant.

A new nursing home near where I live was having a mass recruiting drive through the job centre and so I went along to the home and was accepted for the job. They explained briefly what was expected of me and then did the work as best I could.

Unfortunately, after six months my contract was terminated as my work was not deemed satisfactory, although to this day I still do not know where I went wrong. I strongly suspect that it may have been the fact that when I had finished an allocated task I found it difficult to know what I was supposed to do next.

By now my girls were growing up and often alluded to the fact that I appeared different to other mothers

and they found it difficult to discuss anything with me. Arguments and discussions were impossible as I was usually the one who ended up tearful and upset: I knew what I wanted to say in reply but had difficulty in expressing it. I also found it hard to tell when they were upset and needed comforting and, although I love them, found hugging and physical contact difficult. With their help I now find it easier and try and give them a hug whenever I see them.

They also started saying that I was showing some of the traits of their brother, such as talking in monotone and getting frustrated easily. I also had bad eye contact. My son also finds physical contact difficult. We both misinterpret body language in the way we read it or display it.

In 2001 I had an assessment and was diagnosed as having Asperger syndrome and was relieved to find that there was a reason for all my difficulties.

The psychologist suggested I should receive help in finding work through Prospects, a specialist employment service for people with Asperger syndrome, run by The National Autistic Society. I have been attending Prospects on a regular basis since then for support with my job search and at interviews.

Through their help I secured employment for nearly a year and am about to start a voluntary placement but still hope to find paid employment. During employment I will still need support from Prospects.

Prospects will provide awareness training to my colleagues, as well as ongoing support and training for me to help with interacting at work and delivering what my employer expects from me. Prospects has also given

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me a lot more confidence in myself especially my employment advisor Katie, who is still convinced that I will find more paid employment.

She won't let me give up looking and is constantly looking out for jobs that she thinks would be suitable for me. I now know what to expect at an interview and having someone to give me feedback is very helpful.

When I was growing up there was not the specialist help available that there is now. If there had been I probably would have been able to achieve higher standards in school and leave with more than 'O' levels. I don't think I would have needed to

go to a 'special' school but could have benefited with the help of a classroom assistant.

I did not pass my 11+ but fortunately my parents could afford to send me to a private school which meant smaller classes. I hated the school but looking back it was probably the best thing for me at the time because I think I would have achieved even less in the secondary modern schools of the 1960s.

The hardest part of having Asperger's is not having any real friends, especially girlfriends with whom I could go shopping or even just have a chat.

I do have a lot of acquaintances through my synagogue and also through a social club I sometimes attend but, although they are all friendly enough to me when I see them, I am never included in events they may be arranging.

I have just had to accept the fact that I will have to do most things on my own although I do have a boyfriend. He understands me and helps keep me sane and puts up with all my idiosyncrasies. This means that I am not completely on my own.

Judy

My semantic pragmatic articulation

I have a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome (AS). However, after reading the literature on AS and Semantic Pragmatic Disorder (SPD), I have decided that the probability is that I could be listed under either definition.

I feel I have difficulties with mental and verbal co-ordination – it's hard for me to match my thoughts and reasoning to my spoken words. More plainly, I have difficulty thinking and talking at the same time. I also have motor clumsiness, so this could mean that I am dyspraxic as well, to a degree.

I will give you an example of how I feel my verbal and mental co-ordination difficulties affect my performance on everyday tasks.

I am in the kitchen doing the washing up – in my head I have an expectation of an object's physical locality within the kitchen's domain. If something is not how/where I expect it to be, I feel I don't know how to take the initiative to handle the different situation. I may know what needs doing but I physically will not do it or, sometimes, I just don't know mentally what to do. If I escape from this highly demanding situation, perhaps lie on the bed with the curtains closed and read a magazine on my special interest, I have time to adjust and then, later, I can return to what I was doing.

It's very easy for me to become self absorbed in my special interests – philosophising about something like 'who is God' or reciting in my mind the last couple of

minutes of the countdown dialogue for the launch of the space shuttle - while I'm doing domestic tasks. This is very disruptive for me and I end up taking ages to finish what, to most people, would be a very simple task.

I think that people generally react to the world around them in a vaguer and less precise way than myself. I pay more attention to detail. I am so focused on the detail and have an expectation of repeated order that I don't perform as well or get simple things done. Disorder is part of life, I know. But it is not workable for me.

I have great difficulty with certain words. Words like, 'profound'. When I read this word I have to reconstruct it into a longer, more literal sentence before I am able to fully understand. This is what I mean about my being very precise. So I have quite a different way of understanding than the regular person. So as a student I guess I would need an individual training programme.

I guess this all ties into the idea that people with AS perceive the world differently to others. AS is not about having something wrong with me. It's about being different. I may be seen as strange because I am uncommon and the world is made up of common people who work their societies to their commonalities.

Difference, I would like to see embraced. Difference is good, I guess.

Nicholas Craig Marshall



letters to the editor

Dear John

I appreciate that *Asperger United* is a newsletter produced by and for people with Asperger syndrome. But, although I am only the mother of a young man with AS, I hope you won't mind me sending this letter to thank you for an interesting, informative and often inspiring read.

I was particularly touched by two pieces in the April issue – P. Harrison's account of his first social group meeting and J. Wakely's letter and wonderful poem.

I felt great sadness that both of these obviously extremely skilled and intelligent professionals had experienced such difficulties. But also great admiration for all that they had achieved, not only in pursuing those careers despite the problems associated with AS, but also for their determination to overcome their fears and to try to make sense of, and connect to, this mad world in which we live!

My son is wonderfully different, and comes from a family who happily acknowledge themselves as weirdly eccentric – long live individuality I say! It's not the people with AS who are the problem, but rather the frustratingly close-minded, unimaginative and unforgiving society around us, constantly trying to bash square pegs into round holes, rather than celebrating their 'squareness'!

And if anyone doubts that, just read those articles by P. Harrison and J. Wakely again. Congratulations and good luck to them and very best wishes to all at *AU* and their readers.

Nicky Simmons

Dear John

My name is Edward. I am 29 years old and currently live in a psychiatric hospital in Lincoln. I have Asperger syndrome and, although I am very intelligent, I also have a mild learning disability.

I have been living here since November 2003. I was diagnosed at the age of 21 at Elliot House in Bromley. From age 14-16 I attended a special needs school and from 17-22 I lived at a Camphill Community. Then from the age of 22 I lived in an autism specific home near Lincoln.

My main interests are dates, rock music, buses and coaches, ferries, animals and philosophy.

I suffer with severe anxiety and, although, I've had problems since birth, I seem to remember my childhood up to the age of 13 as being reasonably happy.

Wherever I go or whatever I do I will unintentionally find something to worry about. I have been extremely determined in the past to try and overcome them and, although I have incredible will power, anxiety

and worrying is just something in my life that will power can not overcome.

At school, in January 1990, there were some pupils with behaviour problems and I felt, being 15, I should now start to have a good time and start behaving badly like some of the other pupils, although I desperately didn't want to.

Another one of my anxieties is 'unfairness' and the way normal people in society treat people with special needs.

Dear *AU* - hello from USA

My name is Kathy. I have HFA and have been getting your newsletter for the last few years and like it a lot. I live and work in Denver, Colorado in the USA and have been to England twice (in '93 and '96). I hope one of these days to visit England again.

My interests revolve around: geography, history, politics, flags (I have over 200, including Britain's), cats and science fiction. My knowledge of English history comes from reading the history of other European countries. I realized this when I was in England in 1996 and went to some museums and Highgate cemetery and read all the signs and looked at the exhibits and was familiar with much of the history.

One of the things I like most about England is the tradition of the Labour Party and the fact that there is a strong Marxist tradition. In the US, there is no party that represents workers. Socialists like me either vote for the Democrats or vote 3rd party (I vote Green) and know that 3rd parties only get less than 5% of the vote. And it made me happy when I read that the majority of the English people were against going to war with Iraq (despite Tony Blair being buddy buddy with Pres. Bush).

One of the things that I do is that on Tuesday nights I attend the Downing Group, a group of people on the spectrum who come and meet and socialize at my apartment. Basically all we do is talk, play cards, and pet the cats. Lately, we have been meeting at a bookstore downtown because of problems with bed bugs. Please contact me on kgrant5709@aol.com



How to reply to **Pen Pals**

- Please remember to let us know the name of the person who your letter is for.
- To contact a pen pal, please send your letter to *Asperger United*, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG.
- We will pass your letter on to the person you wish to contact. However, we cannot guarantee the person will reply as that is entirely their decision.
- Please note that all penpal letters sent via *Asperger United* are opened before being passed on.
- Young people under the age of sixteen must have parental permission before placing a pen pal advertisement in *Asperger United*.

****Important notice - please read****

Asperger United is happy to publish pen pal adverts but we must stress that we are not a pen pal or introduction organisation. We do not match people up and we cannot monitor letters (other than the first one, that is sent via us) so please be cautious when releasing personal details in your letters. The National Autistic Society/*Asperger United* cannot intervene or be held responsible for any ensuing correspondence between letter writers.

Do you live in North West London?
Are you aged between 16-25 years?
Would you like to meet up once a week/month to socialise? Most ideas/venues considered.

Please contact Tom via AU.

My name is Derren

I am 14 and I live in Northampton. My main interests are cars, particularly fast ones. I also enjoy playstation games, riding my bike and tennis. I work in a coffee bar in school holidays. I go to Mablethorpe for my holidays. Pen pals of either sex, teenage and in any area.

My name is Claire. I am 22 and was diagnosed with AS last October 2003. I am from the north west of England. I have AS and am fortunate to have a job and a fiancé.

I would like to hear from females aged 20+ who have AS – about their life experiences with AS and hopefully create some friendships along the way.

Interested in playing snooker?

35-year-old male with Asperger syndrome looking for snooker partner in the Hemel Hempstead area.

Please contact via AU



Van Gogh's portrait of the age

He sits at his table doing the crossword;
 A Zen crossword – doing it by not doing it
 A man who sits and thinks and doesn't.
 His dreams of riches gnawed at by the mice;
 His ambitions of fame drying cold on the plate;
 A man with a girl-friend in every town except his own;
 A myriad of friends he never sees or calls,
 His cushion stained with gravy,
 His dictionary torn and thumb-eared,
 The television jerking soundlessly,
 His fish-tank as still as the grave,
 The Chinese carpet parked with boxes,
 The cupboard filled with boxes,
 Shelves full of boxes and books -
 Everything either in books or boxes -
 The sideboard arranged like a garden,
 Filled glass jars the perennials,
 Height provided by the wooden spoons,
 Showy displays of cheese and jam tarts,
 Old favourites like the egg-carton and toaster;
 Hanging things from the available hooks,
 An Inuit montage, the parsley crop, and wind chimes,
 A snake of napkin rings, and a banana rack of cards;
 By his chair a bag of heavy metals,
 With a flattened water-cylinder atop,
 An Inca sculpture with its burnished tones;
 And everywhere a stillness like a latent spring,
 The leaning tower of flower pots, the piles of paper,
 The glass jars full of coloured string.
 Poised for Aslan's coming,
 Waiting for the Sun to come,
 And warm the hearts of Man.

Andrew Weston-Webb 2003

Hidden disability

A is for aeroplane
 I Understand aeroplanes
 I like Talking about aeroplanes
 I am only Interested in aeroplanes
 I live my life Smiling at aeroplanes
 I have learned how to Make friends with aeroplanes

AU reader

Days

There are days when the world
 Is on your back and you want to
 Fall,
 When every hour is a battle and
 Every second a war,
 There are days when emotions are
 Running and doing all they can to
 Drag you down,
 When you want with all your heart
 To smile but can only Raise a frown.

There are days when you want to
 Scream and get all those feelings
 Out,
 When you're so pent up with the anger
 Of another silence becomes your shout,
 There are days that every dog should have
 Or so the saying goes,
 When you want so much to be understood
 But only God knows.

There are days you see no way out and are
 Constantly looking for the door,
 When looks could kill and surely will because
 You feel so raw,
 There are days for living and chasing after
 Dreams that can never be found,
 When everyone you meet is luck and you are
 Left face down.

There are days my friend and days my friend
 You want to push aside,
 When all hope is gone and all you can do is
 Sit back and enjoy the ride,
 There are days that come and never go that seem
 Without end,
 When you will want to give in to the daylight's
 Demands or go around the bend.

There are days that you will win and climb
 Above the rest,
 When No one and nothing can beat you
 Because you are at your best,
 There are days when laughter comes and is always
 At your side,
 When everything you do is right and you
 No longer want to hide.

Richard Longstaff

My name is Gareth. I am 16 and live in Cardiff. People in school do not understand what Asperger syndrome is and for five long years I have kept it a secret. My AS isn't too severe, no one suspects that I have it and I'm not bullied. However, I am ridiculed for my lack of social interaction.

Life is frustrating because people reject me and I have no one to hang out with on weekends and holidays. Now that summer is approaching there will be no one to hang out with.

I'm trying to improve the situation by getting into shape, joining clubs and getting a job in order to make new friends. Though I look forward to better times ahead, I would like to befriend an AS girl with similar interests to mine. I'm interested in movies and art and I like people with a sense of humour. If you're a girl with AS, around my age and living in the Cardiff area, please write soon.

My name is Matthew and I am aged 19. I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome at 12.

My hobbies include surfing the net, reading crime books mainly (although I have recently finished reading the new Paul Burrell book), selling and buying on eBay, homemade cooking, listening to my 100 plus music tracks on my Apple Ipod MP3 player which includes: Tatu and Eminem, watching television soaps such as Eastenders and I also like using the Royal Mail postal service. I send letters usually by 1st class ordinary post but sometimes recorded or special delivery.

If anyone out there across the world is reading this and is around my age and feels they share the same or similar interests to mine please feel free to contact me

My name is Daniel. I am 28 and would like a female pen pal around the same age.

I was recently diagnosed with mild AS and I am still learning about how it affects me and others. I am sure that there are others out there who have been going through a similar pattern to me.

I have a lot of interests, although the main ones are science and music. Playing the guitar is a passion as well as an obsession, as is listening to music. I like occasional reading, watching films and am obsessed by Airwolf, the 1980s TV series. I also enjoy cycling - which is great here in Inverness.

I am a 19 year old female with Asperger syndrome. I am attempting to start up a friendship group for young women with AS or similar difficulties in the Southport area as I feel that not enough provision is made for our particular needs.

The aim of the group is to bring together females aged 13-25 to socialise - such as shopping, going to the cinema, or just to have a group of contacts who understand our difficulties

If you're interested or know somebody who may be, please write to Katie through *Asperger United* or email at: Fushia_groan@hotmail.com

My name is Colin and I was diagnosed four years ago at the age of 48 and now live in Peterborough to be near my family.

Unfortunately, I was not diagnosed at school so the help was not there as it is now. I am unable to write very well, therefore my sister is writing this letter for me.

I like collecting classic type videos and a wide selection of music; I also like to travel to places of interest. Life has been very lonely as I do everything on my own. Is there anyone in my area who would like to make contact through *AU* and maybe share company and hopefully friendship?

I'm an aspiring writer, who's had work published (both in *Asperger United* and on Shooting People.org). I've scripted two adverts for autism awareness and currently writing and producing my first film. It's just a promo for a charity I volunteer for, but it's a really good start.

Wishing to expand and capitalise on this, I am interested in collaborating with a fellow writer and film maker/ animator (with contacts) in the London area for future projects. My biggest passions are 50's-70's horror, science fiction, exploitation, French Nouvelle Vague cinema, documentaries and Czech animation. In short: left field and cult cinema. Since I am interested in documentary film making, this could be a great means of getting disability issues into the open, especially as the corporate media seldom addresses them. Saying this, my documentary reviews were greatly received on Shooting people and people are receptive to my ideas.

INDUSTRY CONTACTS ARE A MUST!!

Chris Henniker - contact via *AU*

Dear John

The following article is about my life with Asperger syndrome (AS). I hope my story will give other readers courage that bullying can be overcome and things can be achieved and life can be coped with.

My name is Richard, I'm 29 and I was diagnosed with AS in January 2001 at the age of 26.

After years of wondering why I felt so different from other people, my diagnosis came as a relief.

I remember from the age of six I felt different from other kids my age. When on holiday with my family I would feel alone and felt that there was a huge wall between me and other people. This stopped me from having the confidence to talk to them because I was frightened of rejection and of being laughed at.

In 1983 I remember I used to act out scenes from books I had read and talk to myself loudly in the school playground. One day a girl reported me to the teachers, telling him that I was talking to myself. I remember being given the slipper afterwards.

I used to love pretending that I was one of the people in the children's TV series, *Chips Comic*, involving a woman (Elsa), a man (Inky) and a dog (Rover), as well as a huge red and yellow computer. I was fascinated by how the computer would print out coloured pictures of the real life people in the series.

I used to go in the playground at school singing tunes to myself and writing words in thin air in different styles with my finger. I was always on my own at school, I never played with others, so this solitary game was a way to kill time at break.

I didn't do well at junior school and the teachers used to say I was a dreamer and a fidgeter. I used to get moods of melancholy and be on my own a lot of the time, but also I would get into hysterical laughter

and not be able to stop.

For the first two years at secondary school I was bullied frequently. I was called names like 'big ears', 'drug addict', 'batfink' and other horrid names that I don't want to print. Naturally my schoolwork suffered and I ended up bottom of the class in virtually every subject except English, which I had always been very good at.

From the third year onwards I decided to throw myself into schoolwork to take my mind off all the verbal abuse. My work improved and, despite the bullying – over the way I looked, apparently (odd and not normal), I got 8 GCSEs.

I did A levels in English, History and French but, even though I was older, the bullying continued. Because of my physical appearance and my clumsiness (I could never do sports or chemistry experiments), I was called 'Mr Bean' by virtually everyone. However, amazingly, I managed to gain 3 A grade A levels and went on to Manchester University to read English Literature.

If school was bad then university was much, much worse for me. I was living in halls of residence where I was bullied by the so called 'students of Law' and 'Electronics'.

They once threw me into a bath, read my diaries, switched off my electricity outside so I couldn't do my work and used to knock on my door in the early hours, just for fun.

Apart from that, I hated the English course. I couldn't cope with the high level of literature analysis, and I was desperately lonely. I spent most of my first year at university walking up

and down the streets of Manchester alone, humming music to myself. I yearned for the regularity and structure of school, even though my school days were far from happy.

The second and third years at university were not much better. In July 1996 I gained an English literature degree. I really don't know how I passed the exams – I found them so difficult.

I struggled to find employment, and I am currently unemployed. I am not able to hold down a job because I have problems with my self-image, always wondering what others think of me, and I find it extremely difficult to form and sustain relationships with people.

My dog died after leaving university and I met my father for the first time ever (at the age of 22) but he rejected me. I also suffer from Irritable Bowel Syndrome and my depression worsened.

I was bullied into dismissal from a teacher training school on the grounds of being 'immature, inadequate and unable to make or sustain relationships with children or other teachers'.

My depression and isolation worsened and in 2000 I agreed to take anti-depressants.

At first I took Lustral (Sertraline) and Solian (amisulpride), and then I took Efexor (Venlafaxine) and Zyprexa (olanzapine). I find venlafaxine very effective for treating panic disorder, while the olanzapine reduces my paranoia. I should mention that paranoia has really affected me since leaving university. It got so bad in 2000 that

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my behaviour changed considerably and this isolated me further.

I was diagnosed with AS by a psychologist at a hospital I had been referred to for the monitoring of my psychiatric drugs. My inability to form friendships, my little weird obsessions and my loneliness as a unique person began to make sense.

I remember a school acquaintance playing a Scalextric car game with another boy while I just looked on. I remember him saying about me, 'he doesn't enjoy life does he'. That always stays with me, and now I think I know why.

At leisure centres, I used to sit alone in the cloakroom while everyone else played games. I didn't know why I was so alone all the time. But the diagnosis of AS has helped me to understand my behaviour. I suffer

terribly with loneliness. I don't speak to any people in the street where I live, and my friends are always busy at weekends. But I have taken up knitting and have been writing poetry for years – two very therapeutic activities.

One big problem for me is I absolutely hate noise. The kids in the street kick a ball against a metal gate next door to where I live day and night, and the sound causes me indescribable anguish. I'm hypersensitive to noise like this but I have found earplugs to be quite helpful.

I have a few good friends who also have AS, and we belong to a support group. My life has improved since those terrible school and university days. Now I have music and art and so many wonderful things to occupy my time with.

I have learned to try to love myself and to forget the bad times, or learn from them. I will survive! School and bullying can be survived. I am still learning to love myself for what I am; I am not going to pressurise myself - it will take as long as it takes. I hope other readers can see that bullying at school can be overcome and qualifications can be achieved.

Life is so hard but can be coped with, with the right support. I wish you all strength in your daily lives and and I pray for strength each night.

Richard

Thank you Richard - I'm sure many of our readers will empathise with your experience.

John

Autism London Women's Asperger Group

This is a support group for women with Asperger syndrome living in the London area, which has monthly meetings facilitated by one of the Autism London Support Service Officers. The meetings are a chance to meet other women facing similar difficulties, to talk about common issues, and to support and gain support from each other.

The group meets at the Autism London Offices at:
1 Floral Place, off Northampton Grove, London N1

The group currently meets on the last Thursday of the month from 2pm to 3.30pm

Dates for meetings 2004 are as follows:

Thursday 29 July
No meeting held in August
Thursday 30 September
Thursday 28 October
Thursday 25 November

Please try to arrive by 2pm. Light refreshments will be available

Contact Gill for further information on: 020 7704 0501
email: gill@autismlondon.org.uk

Autism London Asperger Group

This is a support group for adults with Asperger syndrome living in the London area. It is a chance to meet others, to talk about common issues, and to support and help each other. We have also had one trip so far, and hope to plan more this year.

The group meets at the Autism London offices at:
1 Floral Place, off Northampton Grove, London N1

The group currently meets on the first Tuesday of the month – 6.30pm to 8.30pm
(this may sometimes vary due to bank holidays)

Dates for meetings for 2004 are as follows:

No meeting held in August
Tuesday 7 September
Tuesday 5 October
Tuesday 2 November
Tuesday 7 December

Come along and give it a try; if you do come along, please do try to arrive between 6.30 and 7pm. There will be refreshments/ snacks available.

Contact Gill for further information on: 020 7704 0501
email: gill@autismlondon.org.uk

Has the internet changed your life, or are you just not interested? Your views are valuable

I am a PhD student at the University of Nottingham and am keen to hear from adults with a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome or high functioning autism, who would like to take part in a project investigating how and why they are using the Internet. I am interested in how the internet is, or is not, being used as a means of communication.

I am looking for a large number of volunteers who would be willing to provide me with their names and addresses. You would then be sent a questionnaire and a freepost envelope for return after completing it, should you decide to do so. Alternatively, the questionnaire will be available for completion on an internet webpage. The questionnaire would include questions about your use of computers and the internet, as well as other questions about yourself, including hobbies, leisure and communication in general. All information gathered would be kept confidential.

Again I would emphasise that, as well as hearing from people who use the internet, information from those who do not is also very valuable to help me understand the situation more fully.

If you would be willing to help, or would like further information, please write, phone, fax or email with your name and contact details to:

Penny Benford
University of Nottingham
School of Community Health Sciences
ADRU
B Floor, The Medical School
Queens Medical Centre
Nottingham NG7 2UH

Tel: 0115 846 6382 Fax: 0115 942 3618
Email: mcxpb@nottingham.ac.uk

New book news

Mental health in people with autism and Asperger syndrome: a guide for health professionals

Christine Deudney

Section on catatonia by Dr Amitta Shah

People with autism and Asperger syndrome are particularly vulnerable to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression, especially in late adolescence and early adult life. This booklet emphasises the diagnosis and treatment of depression, anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder.

The book stresses that health professionals need a good understanding of Asperger syndrome in order to work effectively with patients on the spectrum. Dr Amitta Shah's section on catatonia is especially interesting because she is spearheading research into this field.

This succinct 16-page booklet is important reading for health professionals, as well as people with Asperger syndrome and autism, their families and carers.

Mental health in people with autism and Asperger syndrome is published by The National Autistic Society and, like all the best books on autism and Asperger syndrome, it is available from NAS Publications. It costs £1.50, plus postage and packing.

Special offer to readers of Asperger United!

Normally we charge an additional £3.95 for postage and packing on all book orders but readers of *Asperger United* can get their copies without this additional charge until 31 October 2004. Just send your order, together with cheque or postal order made payable to the NAS or your credit card details, to *Asperger United* – see page 2 for full contact details.

For your free copy of this catalogue contact *Asperger United* or see our website: www.nas.org.uk/pubs

Employment Champions

The National Autistic Society (NAS) wants to celebrate and promote good practice in the workplace. The NAS would like to recognise those employers, colleagues, HR managers and anyone else who successfully support individuals with autism or Asperger syndrome in the workplace anywhere in the UK. We therefore invite your nomination for an 'Employment Champion' award to be given to someone you feel has made a positive contribution. The deadline for nominations is 6 August. For a nomination form or more information please contact Gavin Owen, Policy and Campaigns Officer - Adults, National Autistic Society, 393 City Road, London EC1V 1NG. Tel: 020 7903 3558 or email gowen@nas.org.uk



Asperger United, c/o The National Autistic Society, 393 City Road,
London EC1V 1NG.
Telephone: 020 7833 2299. Fax: 020 7833 9666.
Email: asp.utd@nas.org.uk
Website: www.nas.org.uk

