

Nita Jackson

Nita is a young woman with Asperger Syndrome, and author of ‘Standing Down, Falling Up’ which relates her experiences as a teenager, growing up with autism.

Currently she is studying Spanish with Open University, but has a good working knowledge of both Russian and Japanese - languages are her passion. She reads grammar books for fun!

In her spare time, she helps her mum to run SAFE (Supporting Asperger Families in Essex) by talking to other Aspies and helping them with their problems, as well as continuing to write her second book, drawing, playing the piano and working on designs for her Nail Art course.

Nita’s talk will include:

- Growing up with Aspergers
- Experiences in school
- The positive, up side of Aspergers
- The negative, down side of Aspergers
- Helpful things schools can change or take into account
- The type of coping strategies that work for me in an unpredictable world

Carolann Jackson

Carolann is Chair of the charity SAFE (Supporting Asperger Families in Essex) and runs ASAP (Asperger Syndrome Adults and Parents). She is very active in the world of Asperger, working with local and national groups and statutory agencies to highlight the lack of appropriate services for our autistic community. Currently she sits as Parent Representative on the Department of Health’s ‘Autism External Reference Group’ which was set up to identify the unmet needs of people with autism and AS.

By day she teaches teens with Asperger Syndrome, and those with moderate learning disabilities at a local college, implementing some of the strategies Nita would have wanted. But most important of all, she is mum to Nita.

Carolann’s talk:

- Nita’s long journey to recognition
- Diagnosis of her condition
- The sort of pressures we faced as parents with no support
- The effect her school/college difficulties had on her and our family
- What services I believe should have been put in place then and now.

Kirstin Conroy

Kirstin Conroy is a graduate from Trinity College and has worked as a behavioural specialist for over 15 years with children with special needs and challenging behaviours. She lectures for School of Progressive Education and Kildare VEC in Special Needs Assistant Skills and provides home tuition to children with autism.

Managing Behaviours and Building Self Esteem in the Primary School Child..Kirstin’s presentation on Managing Behaviours and Building Self Esteem in the Primary School

Child will examine a range of key issues, including:

- Self esteem as the key to a child’s success.
- Some behavioural management strategies will be examined
- An outlook on children’s intellect and learning styles will be discussed.

Marie Butler

“If only he could talk”- Communication Disorders in Autism. Presented by Marie Butler Speech and Language Therapist.

Purpose of this talk:

- Outline the spectrum of communication difficulties which present in autism/Aspergers Syndrome.
- Recognise the individual communication needs of children diagnosed with Autism.
- Examine the importance of communicative intent.
- Demonsrate some of the tools used by Speech and Language Therapists to engage children on the spectrum.

Topics will include:

- Talking/communicating.
- Language traits of children on the spectrum.
- Speech and Language Therapist’s role.
- SNA role in supporting communication with adults and peers.

Karen Lowther

Is your child available for learning?

Sensory Issues for the child with ASD.

Karen Lowther (B.A.,M.Sc.,P.G.C.E.)
Special Needs Teacher
School of the Holy Spirit,
Kilkenny

Karen has been teaching in a Special Primary School for over fourteen years. She has had extensive experience and training in TEACCH, IABA, Multi-Sensory Integration and DIR Floortime, and the implementation of these principles in the classroom.

Over the past six years she has also been involved in speaking to parents, teachers and SNAs through seminars and workshops about appropriate and practical strategies and ideas in the education of children with autism.

A core piece in her work centres on helping the child with ASD to be available, focused and ready to learn.

- What is Sensory Integration?
- Sensory Issues for the child with ASD
- Sensory Dysfunction
- Multi-Sensory Integration and the need for regulation of the child
- How you can assist the child with ASD be focused and available for learning
- Possible Classroom Strategies



Special Needs Assistants Group Ltd. NEWSLETTER Tenth Edition January 2010 www.snagroup.ie

What’s New in 2010

We hope everyone has had a relaxing and restorative Christmas break, and survived the ‘Big Freeze’ fairly comfortably.

2009 has turned out to be a year full of change and challenge, and many SNAs and others involved in the education field are feeling uncertain about what 2010 will hold for them. It will definitely be a time of adaption and flexibility.

SNAG has had a number of enquiries around what individuals should do during the days of Industrial Action taken in schools late last year. For a number of you it caused considerable anxiety and even distress.

Unfortunately SNAG cannot make recommendations in this area and the decisions for those not part of a Union (IMPACT or SIPTU) had to be personally made. For SNAs not already affiliated to one of these Unions it may be time to visit their websites (www.impact.ie ; www.siptu.ie) and consider the possible benefits of membership in these times of uncertainty and change in the education sector, and most especially in the deployment of SNAs in schools. Further information can also be found on the Department of Education and Science website at www.education.ie .

The big new event for us in SNAG in 2009 was seeing a newly revamped website take shape at www.snagroup.ie . For any of you who have not yet visited the site we would encourage you to do so as it is YOUR site, to help, assist and inform you in your work as SNAs. We also hope it will be of benefit to parents, teachers and other professionals working with Special Needs Children in Ireland. We are continuing work on the site, and would invite comments on how we can improve on content and make it work better and more efficiently for SNAs registered with us.

In this time of fluidity and change SNAG is adapting its training and professional development format to include Workshops along with the Seminars and Annual Conferences we have run in the past. These will take place

on an evening or half- day basis, and be more flexible in terms of venue, value and content. If you or your school would have any request for a particular type of workshop or training we would try to facilitate this providing numbers are sufficient. A list of the initial workshops currently on offer are on page - .

We know that 2010 will be a time of transition and challenge on many levels. We look forwards with anticipation to a year of renewed friendships, and continue in our aim of providing active support, assistance and on-going professional development. We take this opportunity to wish you all a Peaceful and Positive 2010.

Catherine and Karen

DANDY WALKER - AN EXPLANATION

The diagnosis of a child with a particular special need always comes as a shock for a family. Families quite often experience feelings of anger, grief, worry and a sense of loss for what might have been. There are worries about the future and for what it holds for the child and the child’s family. These emotions are all very natural and after a period are usually replaced by feelings of joy, happiness, love and an overwhelming desire to provide the child with every opportunity to develop his or her true potential. Every milestone the child reaches, every little achievement is cherished and celebrated. A close relative of mine has just found out that the child she is carrying has Dandy Walker Anomaly. This was discovered at one of her routine per-natal scans. Of course it is devastating to discover your child isn’t healthy but as time passes what becomes crucial for the parents is the desire to learn everything there is to know about the condition. This is essential for parents, family and indeed anyone who will be dealing with the child.

Dandy Walker is a congenital (meaning present at birth) brain malformation involving the area at the back of the brain called the cerebellum and the fluid filled spaces around it. It is a genetically sporadic disorder occurring only in 1 out of 25,000-30,000 births and is predominantly found in females. It is also referred to as Dandy Walker Malformation, Dandy Walker Complex, Dandy Walker Variant or Dandy Walker Cyst. It is named after two doctors Walter E. Dandy and Arthur E. Walker who described the signs and symptoms of the condition in the early 1900's.

Dandy Walker Anomaly describes a number of different symptoms and can affect individuals with varying levels of severity. Not all people are affected in the same way and in fact some may be asymptomatic for most of their lives whereas others are more dramatically affected. Dandy Walker is characterised by an incomplete formation ,either partial or complete of the cerebellar vermis (the area of the brain between the two cerebral hemispheres). A cyst is formed in the internal base of the skull, a part called the posterior fossa. Dilation of the fourth ventricle is also found - this is the space between the medulla and the cerebellum. This may interfere with the body's ability to drain cerebrospinal fluid from the brain, resulting in hydrocephalus in 70 - 90% of patients. A number of associated conditions may result . These include :

- slow motor development in early infancy i.e. inability to use the small and large muscles in the body effectively for such things as sucking reflex, pincer grip, sitting, walking etc.
- abnormal breathing patterns
- increased intracranial pressure, which in older children may cause irritability, vomiting and convulsions
- cerebellar dysfunction causing ataxia(lack of co-ordination of muscle movements) and nystagmus (jerky eye movements)
- heart malformations
- possible malformations of the face, limbs and digits (fingers and toes)

- urinary structural abnormalities
- hydrocephalus
- enlarged skull which may be progressive (macrocrania)
- sensory difficulties

The above is a list of some of the main characteristics of the condition and as I have previously stated not every individual will bear all of the symptoms. Dandy Walker Alliance show a heart-warming video clip on their web-site (<http://www.dandy-walker.org/>) of a number of beautiful children all living with Dandy Walker and plenty of lovely stories from families of sufferers who have lead and continue to lead active and fulfilling lives. Another good source of information is the Dandy Walker link on Facebook which allows access to personal stories from families around the world .

The diagnosis of Dandy Walker Anomaly may be made before birth by ultra-sound, CT scan or MRI . In the case of my relative, it was diagnosed at 22 weeks and the baby girl is due at the end of March 2010. A heart defect was discovered and also a cyst at the base of her brain. She appears to be physically perfectly formed in every other way and her family have already named her Louise Josephine. They know the road ahead is going to be full of challenges for little Louise and for their family but they are comforted by the fact that the doctors are already preparing for her arrival and have given her a great prognosis. She will require heart surgery and the insertion of a shunt (small tube which drains off fluid) at the base of her brain, which is a treatment for hydrocephalus. Once the shunt is in place cerebral fluid begins draining from the brain and the brain can start regrowing the neural synapses .

Treatment of the condition involves treating of the associated conditions. Medical help, technology and the management of the hydrocephalus is much more effective in modern times which is said to reduce the occurrence of intellectual delay.

Anti-convulsants are used to treat any seizures.



Special Needs
Assistants
Group Ltd.

Snagroup Seminar

Understanding the child with ASD/Asperger Syndrome

Hudson Bay Hotel Athlone
Saturday 13th of March

Speakers:

Nita Jackson: Author

Carolann Jackson: Teacher and Parent

Kirsan Conroy: Behavioural Specialist

Marie Butler: Senior Speech and Language Therapist

Karen Lowther: Special Needs Teacher

Registered SNA's -€95

Teachers, Parents, SNA's not registered with snag- €110

9.45-4.20 Price includes lunch and tea/coffee in the afternoon.

Certificates of Attendance provided on the day.

Booking form:

Name:

Address:

.....

Registration no:

Phone:

Mobile:

Please send cheque or postal order to:

Snagroup,
316 Morell Grove,
Naas,
Co. Kildare

Email:snagroup@eircom.net or snagroup1@gmail.com 0857716733/4



SNAGROUP WORKSHOP

Basic Life Support For Children Cardiac Arrest and Foreign Body Airway Obstruction

Mark Hyland (Firefighter/Paramedic Dublin Fire Brigade)
Firetc Safety Solutions
Fire Medical and Health and Safety Training

- New CPR guidelines • Foreign body airway obstruction in kids •
- The Chain of Survival • CPR for children •

Seminar on ADHD

Kirstin Conroy is a graduate from Trinity College and has worked as a behavioural specialist for over 15 years with children with special needs and challenging behaviours. She lectures for School of Progressive Education and Kildare VEC in Special Needs Assistant Skills and provides home tuition to children with autism.

- ADHD - myth or reality ? •
- Learn behavioural techniques to deal with the ADHD child •
- Skills building for the ADHD child - mind mapping and relaxation techniques •

SNAs registered with Snagroup €65 • SNAs not registered with Snagroup €85

Price includes both seminars and tea/coffee & sandwiches

Certificates of attendance provided on the day

Times: 5.00 till 10.00

Workshop Venues (Please tick)

- ☐ Meath : 26th of February , Newgrange Hotel 5.00 till 10.00
☐ Cork : 19th of March, Vienna Woods Hotel 5.00 till 10.00
☐ Tipperary : 26th of March Anner Hotel 5.00 till 10.00

Block Capitals

Name: _____ Registration Number: _____

Address: _____

Mobile Number: _____

Workshop Location: Please tick chosen venue

Payment Method: Please do not send cash.

Bank Draft/Cheque/Postal order made payable to Snagroup, 316 Morell Grove, Naas, Co Kildare.

Telephone: Catherine at 0857716734 or Karen at 0867716733.

Or email snagroup@eircom.net or snagroup1@gmail.com

Heart surgery is performed to correct any cardiac defects. Balance problems are treated using physical therapy and occupational therapy. Speech therapy may be needed. The involvement of the multi-disciplinary team is of paramount importance.

The cause of Dandy Walker is largely unknown although researchers from the University of Chicago, University of Alberta and other institutions have recently announced—that the FOXC1 gene contributes to Dandy-Walker malformation .Prognosis for the condition depends on the severity of symptoms and the spectrum of outcomes are diverse. One parent with a 13 year old advised other parents “ do not always take what doctors say as gospel because Cheyanne has defied them several times and made it through life threatening situations and laughed them off “ (www.specialchild.com/archives) .

Kirsten Conroy



Bluebird Care
North Dublin
(01) 8408222

Bluebird Care is a national organisation that deliver local home care services. We have been operating in Ireland for over two years. We have nine offices in Ireland and over sixty in the U.K. Our clients are generally older people but we do cater for people with special needs. We provide personal, practical and social care. We offer a truly flexible service while maintaining affordability. Our visits range from as little as 15 minutes right up to live-in care.

Our Carers

Our carers are employed by Bluebird Care and are fully insured and Garda vetted. Where applicable, they hold full valid Irish drivers licences and are insured to carry customers. They complete the Bluebird Care training course together with manual handling training. They are Fetac level 5 qualified or working to this qualification. We endeavour to continually upskill our carers and provide specialist training in certain areas. Our carers are recruited, trained and supervised by our Care Manager, Jeanette Halpenny.

If you are interested in a position with Bluebird Care then visit www.bluebirdcare.ie and contact your nearest Bluebird Care Office.

SENSORY ISSUES

For many people with AS, life presents a myriad of things with which they have to contend, not least of all the issue of sensory difficulties. Whilst for NT's (neurotypicals) the five senses are more or less taken for granted and expertly handled unconsciously, a significant number of people with AS are unable to perform the same sort of 'sensory multi-tasking', and what is nothing more than an easily manageable problem for NT's becomes a significant annoyance and/or source of stress for many 'Aspies'.

Broken down, there are so many sensory aspects within one's environment, that for a neurotypical to try and register all of them independently, and simultaneously too, would be nigh on impossible, because they're not wired that way. But for many people with AS, this is less impossible, more downright probable. Ironically, what could be seen as a comparative strength against our NT counterparts, can for many be more of a hindrance.

As a young child, supermarkets used to be my worst nightmare. There was simply so much sensory stimulus – a barrage of elements charging at me, and that I couldn't escape from - that for me it created an overload, and I'd get hysterical. The lighting, the number of people wearing different coloured clothes, the shiny linoleum floor, the metal trolleys, the plastic baskets, the flowers by the entrance, the scents of food and air freshener and people's perfume or cologne or

hairspray, the amount of talking, the announcements over the tannoy, the changes in temperature from the fruit aisle to the frozen food aisle to the snacks aisle... the only element I was often spared from was that of taste, because whenever people got too close to me, to avoid breathing in their scent and thus tasting their chemicals, I would hold my breath for as long as possible. As a child, I often wished to have been born deaf or blind or without arms, simply to be spared such a sensory deluge. It's extremely jarring to think of, actually.

Over time as I grew up, however, I forced myself to develop strategies for how to numb several of my senses, so as to make any supermarket experience bearable. I'll cover up every part of my body except for my face, to escape from having to feel the different textures against my skin, and to reduce changes in temperature. I'll often wear sunglasses to minimize colours. And instead of trying to pay attention to every string of conversation, every bleep, every footstep or rattling of a trolley wheel, I'll let all the sounds merge into one constant, hypnotic wall, like white noise, which I've actually found to be quite soothing, if I'm in a good mood at the time. (Of course, there are a wealth of other strategies besides my own. A friend of mine, who also has AS, always listens to music on his ipod when out shopping alone, to block out exterior noise. I couldn't do this, personally, because I'd end up getting down with my bad self to the music - and trust me, I'm an awful dancer - and audio books or the radio would just distract me further. And renowned author, Donna Williams, famously wears Irlen lenses, which aid a number of autistic related mood and sensory problems, but I've not had the pleasure of trying them out for myself (yet).)

This is all a coping method which I have to employ, otherwise I'd probably end up leaving a supermarket before I'd even began shopping, but of course, it's not without its cons. For example, wearing gloves makes the tangible element of shopping more challenging, and because I'm severely dyspraxic anyway, add to this the reduced tangibility and I often end up dropping items and then finding it quite an ordeal trying to pick them up again. And sometimes, if I'm in a placid mood, the self-enforced 'white noise' can be soothing that I'll be half lulled into a trance, and will end up walking right into another customer, thereby giving rise to unnecessary altercations. So effectively, it's no foolproof method, but most of the time it's certainly the lesser of two evils.

Supermarkets aside, sensory issues in any aspect of life were difficult for me, and where I can't cover myself up virtually from head to toe, or blur sound, I consciously have to channel out.. so much so, in fact, that it's become almost second nature to me. In my late

teens, I used to say (with regard to Aspies in education) that the perfect learning environment for people with AS was 'a separate desk, screened from others, with low level lighting, in a silent room with bare walls and away from windows'. In reality, however, we can't learn or live in an empty warehouse. If we have been blessed - or cursed, depending how you see it - with all five senses (which, having recently lost something which I used to take for granted, I am immensely grateful to still have), then we have to accept those and work with them, not against them.

Nita Jackson

CHRISTMAS DRAW

Congratulations to the winners of our Christmas draw. Our five winners are listed on our website.



Manual Handling

2 hour Manual Handling Course, the aim of the course is to provide persons with the knowledge and training to help them manual handling of loads, and to provide that the employer meets the with the legislation as laid down in The Health Safety and welfare at work act 2005 and the General application regulations of 2007.

80%of adults suffer with back problems and it is the employer's best interest to provide training in manual handling no matter what the person's job entails.

The Law also requires it.

During the course delegates will cover a number of important aspects of manual handling: -

- The Law
- The muscular-skeletal system
- Bio mechanics and mechanism of injury
- Flexibility
- Ergonomics
- Principals of lifting

Course Cost: €250

Email: firetecsafety@gmail.com

Phone Mark on 087 2291357

STRATEGIES FOR STUDY

My daughter Nita's bizarre behaviour drew the bullies like a moth to a flame in all the three mainstream schools she attended. She wasn't diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome until she was due to start college and it took a long time for me to fully realise what she had gone through and how severely her autistic problems had impacted on her life.

I am now a teacher working in a mainstream college with students with disabilities aged 16 - 19, most of whom have AS. I have made it my goal to make these young people's pathway through education as stress-free as possible, and not repeat the traumas my daughter had to go through.

With so many obstacles in their way, both actual and emotional, it's a wonder so many Aspies manage as well as they do. But there are certain things which CAN be done to alleviate stress and calm down inappropriate behaviour .

One area which has been little researched and greatly underestimated is the effect that the environment, both external and internal, can have on Aspies. Their highly developed sensory awareness can amplify certain environmental factors so they can become sensitive to everyday things which we don't even notice. This can lead to anxiety, distress, irritability, non compliance, and confrontation, or alternatively complete withdrawal - hiding away in their internal world, or actually running way from the source of their discomfort, regardless of the consequences.

For instance, our classrooms universally use fluorescent lighting which flickers constantly. Most of us don't notice this, but our Aspies do - all the time! This can disturb them so much that they cannot concentrate and quickly move off task. In many, these lights can also induce headaches and nausea, which could be the starter for aggressive outbursts. If this lighting can be replaced with low eye-level lamps, or dimmed, you will see a marked improvement in performance and behaviour.

Another major factor which can lead to disruption is NOISE in the classroom. Enthusiastic chatter, chairs scraping across floors, paper rustling, pens scratching, loud breathing near to them, the constant hum from those wretched fluorescent lights, tapping, sniffing, creaking floorboards, laughter - all these things can overwhelm and confuse them, leading to inappropriate outbursts. Remember Aspies hear everything all the time - they cannot filter out extraneous noise like neurotypicals can. So what to do? In my class we allow our students to wear ear plugs, or play music on their iPods - loud enough to drown out the sounds they don't want to hear, but not loud enough to cover the teacher's voice. And if the noise levels are too much to bear, they are allowed to leave the classroom and sit in the Library, or walk around the playground until they feel calm again.

Touch, texture and proximity can also lead to major disturbances. Never give an Aspie a 'well done!' pat on the back without warning them first - you are likely to get a punch in the nose! They do NOT like being touched, and even accidental touching - like being pushed in a queue -

can lead to accusations of abuse or bullying. Although they do not like people being near to them, they will constantly invade other's space! So the general rule is either let them sit at the back of the classroom in a corner, or stand at the end of a queue with, say, half an arm's distance between them and another student. Heat, cold, the texture of clothing can all impact on behaviour and learning. Some children cannot wear anything that contains artificial fibres, or feels scratchy, while others react badly to clothing which has been washed in biological products. And when they do - teachers know it! Check with Mum!

Remember too that Aspies get fatigued very quickly when having to mix in neurotypical company - trying to keep up with the flow of conversation, making decisions when to join in and when to stay silent, trying to understand what is being said when much is innuendo and has hidden meanings. They have to work very hard just to keep up and this makes them very tired so concentration levels drop swiftly after a few hours of neurotypical interaction, and irritability/anger sets in. So if there is important academic work to be done it's best to do it in the mornings when they are relatively fresh. In fact the best thing would be for them to have at least two hours' rest before starting the afternoon's programme, but this is not feasible in most mainstream establishments. In our college, we try to help them with their fatigue by giving them a 10 minute 'comfort break' every hour. It really seems to help their concentration and willingness to work.

Aspies are easily distracted, so a modern classroom can be the worst place for them with its hum of activity, its big windows with interesting views and sunlight streaming through; its colourful posters, drawings, attractive books, and equipment - all of which have only one purpose - to distract them from their work! So much more interesting than the lesson!

So, to sum up, in Nita's words, a perfect learning environment for an Aspie is:

- a separate desk, away from others, (preferably screened off)
- with low level lighting
- in a silent room
- away from windows,
- and with bare white walls.

And of course, an iPod close at hand for those 'anxious moments'!

CAROLANN JACKSON

Chair, SAFE (Supporting Asperger Families in Essex)

email: carolann.jackson@talk21.com