



NEWSLETTER

September 2007

Issue #40

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Our Mission Statement

To provide services and programs to families of children diagnosed within the Autism Spectrum Disorders to develop their child's behavioural, communication, and social skills, and to advocate for their ongoing needs.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Well the weather is turning cooler and the kids are back in school. OK, OK, you can all stop cheering now! Last month Jason Dever joined the CAR Board of Directors. Jason is a parent and brings with him a wealth of knowledge in the area of fund-raising, is a computer guru and has an abundance of enthusiasm. He will work closely with Brenda exploring and implementing new avenues for generating funds for CAR. Thanks Jason, welcome, we are fortunate to have you on board.

One mandate CAR has is to increase exposure in the community. Through projects with Rogers TV, the CAR name is getting the best visibility ever. Our new colorful logo is getting recognition throughout the region.

With the help of many volunteers, HOPE Volleyball, Rockin' for Risk, the annual picnic and other events have been great success. With your continued support, our up-coming Pumpkin Carving and other enterprises will continue to be profitable endeavors. Groups are in full swing right now and CAR is looking into additional funding to bring even more services to you in the future.

After many great years of serving on your board, we are sorry to see Craig Perkins leave us. Craig, good luck in the future. Hope to see you all at the CAR open house on October 4th.

Paul Lacroix

Children at Risk's Annual Open House

Thursday, October 4, 2007
7:00 - 9:00 p.m.
2nd Floor, 235 Donald Street

Meet our Board Members!
Meet our Group Facilitators!
See our Offices!

Can we help your family?
Do you know someone who needs help?
Come find out – parents & professionals welcome!

Note: Regarding the Annual Open House ... please find enclosed flyer. Feel free to copy these for distribution in your school/community!

2007/2008 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President:	Paul Lacroix
Vice-President:	Marlene Steppan
Secretary:	Andrea Allingham
Treasurer:	Dean Ryan
Member at Large:	Ed Gratton
Member at Large:	Amanda Telford
Member at Large:	Jason Dever

GOODBYE & THANK-YOU

The Board of Directors for Children at Risk is sad to see the “retirement” of Member at Large **Craig Perkin**. For over 4 years, Craig has served as a dedicated Board Member, directing his efforts to help with the funding and fundraising portfolio. Craig has been instrumental in increasing the profile of Children at Risk with directed United Way donations, as well as other funding proposals and applications. We also recognize the many years prior to becoming a board member that Craig and his wife Olha have contributed to helping the Autism community. We know that Craig and his family will continue to support Children at Risk in fundraising and volunteer ventures and we wish him all the best in his new endeavors!

NEW BOARD MEMBER

Hello – my name is **Jason Dever**! I am married to Christine Dever, I am a father of 3 children, Ashley who is 8 and autistic, Brianna who is 7 and ADHD, and Emily-Grace who is 1 1/2 and very mischievous. I have been in high-tech most of my life, having owned a computer store, Internet company, and worked for Nortel and various other Ottawa high-tech firms. I have run my own consulting practice for the last 6 years, working with IBM and Borland as some of my clients. In the last year, I have taken over my father's financial planning and insurance business, and have as one of my focuses providing guidance and planning to families with children with special needs. I look forward to serving the Autism community through becoming a Board Member for Children at Risk and hope that my experience and background will be of benefit to the charity and the families we support!

CHARITY COORDINATOR'S MESSAGE

Submitted by Brenda Reisch

September is such a whirlwind time, with the children back to school, parents back to work and programs starting up again! Forgotten are those warm summer days when schedules and commitments seemed to go out the window! Children at Risk is also ramping up with our social skill groups, sibling support groups and fundraising events and activities so necessary to fund all these services and supports.

We have now passed the 5 year mark of our 28 year-old charity being independent of government funding – indeed a testament to our supporters and the needs we try to address in the Autism community! However, I always acknowledge that without our dedicated Volunteers coming through for us – none of this would be possible!! We had a record number of new referrals for group supports this summer and are still working on group placements for our Fall session. As President Paul indicated, Children at Risk will be holding its 2nd Annual Open House on Thursday, October 4th – welcoming families and professionals to visit our offices and chat with Board Members and Group Facilitators. It is heartwarming and encouraging to see more government funds being directed to Autism than ever before – but we all know it is still not enough to address the critical needs of a child diagnosed within the Autism Spectrum Disorders and their families. At times it seems like we make 2 steps ahead and 1 back, with the loss of programs like the 4-week July Community Summer Living Program through the Ottawa Public School Board that will affect over 300 children, with probably half of them being severely affected by Autism. However, Children at Risk and other charities and foundations like Autism Ontario, The Spectrum Intervention Group, Angels with Autism, Unity for Autism and more will continue to address the needs of the Autism community and attempt to “fill in the gaps” in the publicly-funded services. We encourage each and every one of you to be active, lobby with your politicians, attend rallies, write letters, start petitions and anything else that will bring the cause of Autism to the forefront. Information and exposure will lead to understanding and support – guaranteed!

FUNDRAISING UPDATE

Submitted by Brenda Reisch
Fundraising Chairperson

UPCOMING EVENTS/ACTIVITIES SINCE JUNE 2007...

What Happened:

ANNUAL FAMILY PICNIC & 12th ANNUAL CHILDREN AT RISK RAFFLE DRAW – JUNE 24, 2007

The 12th Annual Children at Risk Raffle was drawn on June 24th at the Autism Community Annual Family Picnic. Many, many, many thanks to all those who sold/bought tickets and donated prizes – for the first time in 12 years we sold out, raising over \$6,000!

I also wanted to thank the terrific Volunteers who helped to make the Annual Family Picnic so wonderful for our Community! With support from **Autism Ontario's RCP Program** for the Inflatables and donations from companies like **Enbridge Consumer's Gas** (BBQ), **Tannis Foods** (water), **Loblaws Southkeys** (pop), **PlaSmart** (Plasma Cars), **Riverside South Community Association** (burgers, pop, juice, condiments, water), **Weston Bakeries** (buns) and **McDonald's Bronson** (ice) – plus more I am sure I am forgetting – we had a perfect day at the Park!

I also want to make special mention of **Hazel Smith** and her efforts to procure at least half of the supplies for us, not to mention boxes of toys and prizes!!

From the emails I received – a good time was had by all!

Check out this and other photos, as well as the list of Raffle Ticket winners at the end of the Newsletter.



FUNDRAISING UPDATE (Cont'd)

2007 HOPE VOLLEYBALL SUMMERFEST



Alcatel-Lucent
HOPE Volleyball
Summerfest

Children at Risk wants to express our sincere appreciation for the over 50 Volunteers who dedicated their time and efforts on July 14 at the HOPE Volleyball Summerfest!

The following is a note from Doug Kirkland, who headed up Security for HOPE this year – the volunteer assignment for Children at Risk:

I was very impressed with our CAR volunteers and thanks to all of them. I was not able to attend the wrap up last night as I am already at work on two new projects that are demanding my time. I always regret that at the end of an event it is rare to have an opportunity to meet with the volunteers and to express my thanks. I know from both perspectives how valuable the service is to an event and to the opportunity of charity sponsored volunteers to receive a benefit to the charity. Thank you again to you personally and to all the CAR volunteers that came out to help.

Kindest regards, Doug Kirkland

STAINED GLASS STUFF CHARITY GOLF TOURNAMENT

On July 27, 2007, parents and owners of a local business, **Stained Glass Stuff**, held their first annual golf tournament at the Irish Hills Golf Course. Children at Risk was named as the recipient charity, with a donation of \$435 gratefully received! Many thanks to **Kim & Kevin Tappin** for this lovely initiative and generous support of Autism through Children at Risk!

FUNDRAISING UPDATE (Cont'd)

GLOUCESTER NORTH LIONS CLUB

Our own **Bambina Lemme** generously volunteered at the Navan Fair this summer, with a donation of \$90 being directed to Children at Risk. Hats off to Bambina for dedicating her time to Autism – both in and out of the office!

STUDENT FUNDRAISER



Special mention to **Karena Volesky** and her friend **Nicole!** Karena & Nicole are students at St. Paul's Catholic High School.

This spring they took the initiative and, for 2 days, sold hand-made ice-cream sundaes at school (brownies, ice cream, toppings ... yum!) to raise funds for Children at Risk! Our charity received a cheque for \$216.42 for this wonderful gesture from the heart!

CAPITAL CHORDETTES CONTINUE THEIR SUPPORT

Children at Risk has been so very fortunate to receive on-going support from the **Capital Chordettes – Ottawa's Ladies Barbershop Chorus**, with an annual donation each December. This year, they surprised us at the Annual Family Picnic by presenting another cheque for \$1,300! The Chordettes are celebrating their 2nd place standing in a spring area contest – which qualified them to compete in an International Conference in London, Ontario this November. These lovely ladies deserve a round of applause for their continued support of Autism through Children at Risk and please join me in wishing them the best of luck in November!



FUNDRAISING UPDATE (Cont'd)

WHAT IS ON NOW/COMING ...

2007/2008 ENTERTAINMENT COUPON BOOKS



They are here! For only \$35, you too can own this premier discount coupon book that can save you hundreds (even thousands) of dollars on dining out, fast food, services, merchandise, sports and recreational activities.

See the enclosed list of Quickie Convenience Stores that will be selling the book for Children at Risk until January. The book is also available through parent **Merle Hagerman** (613-226-4982) and at the **Kanata Optometry Centre**, 99 Kakulu Rd. (613-592-6193), as well as **Pflug Optical**, 1580 Merivale Rd. (613-723-2766). They make great stocking stuffers and books are available for other major cities like Montreal and Toronto!

12th ANNUAL CELEBRITY-CARVED PUMPKIN CONTEST – OCTOBER 25-27

It is that time of year again – October is Autism Awareness Month and Children at Risk's Celebrity-Carved Pumpkin Contest!

Our event runs from Thursday, October 25th to Saturday, October 27th in 4 Shopping Centres. In order to make this event a success, we need many volunteers to come forward to man the displays.

This fundraiser is one of the most high-profile events for Children at Risk, raising not only valuable funds but awareness and support! Many hands are needed, so please check your schedules and give a little time, even a few hours!!

FUNDRAISING UPDATE (Cont'd)

12th ANNUAL CELEBRITY-CARVED PUMPKIN CONTEST OCTOBER 25-27 (Cont'd)

Here are the Mall requirements:

Merivale Mall

Thursday, October 25th – 10 AM (reception) to 9 PM

Friday, October 26th – 9:30 AM to 9 PM

Saturday, October 27th – 9:30 AM to 5:30 PM

****URGENT**** A Pumpkin Mall Manager is required for Merivale Mall! For more information, please call Brenda at 613-261-4442.

Place d'Orleans

Thursday, October 25th – 12 NOON to 9 PM

Friday, October 26th – 9:30 AM to 9 PM

Saturday, October 27th – 9:30 AM to 5:30 PM

Please contact Andrea Allingham at 613-824-7919, email Allingham@amadha.ca

Carlingwood Shopping Centre

Thursday, October 25th – 12 NOON to 9 PM

Friday, October 26th – 9:30 AM to 9 PM

Saturday, October 27th – 9:30 AM to 5:30 PM

Please contact Alison Armstrong at 836-4742 (h), 613-941-6686 (w), email Armstrong.alison@ic.gc.ca

Lincoln Fields Shopping Centre

Thursday, October 25th – 12 NOON to 9 PM

Friday, October 26th – 9:00 AM to 9 PM

Saturday, October 27th – 9:00 AM to 5:30 PM

Please contact Bambina Lemme at 834-9169, email amc52@primus.ca



Lincoln Fields Shopping Centre will be hosting a "Create Your Own Pumpkin" Craft area from 10 AM to 4 PM on Saturday, October 27. Children will receive a free mini-pumpkin and be able to decorate it from an assortment of craft supplies – plus a treat!

FUNDRAISING UPDATE (Cont'd)

UNITED WAY CAMPAIGN INFO

As this year's campaign kicks off, we wanted to remind everyone that charitable donations through United Way can be directed to your charity of choice, whether they are a United Way charity or not. We welcome the direction of your contribution to Children at Risk to support the services and programs we provide for families raising a child with Autism! This way you can contribute to a workplace campaign and support Autism, as well! Specifically, you need to list:

Name: Children at Risk, Ottawa

Revenue Canada Charitable Registration Number: 10691/3775/RR/0001

While CAR does not receive direct funding from United Way, our last bi-annual cheque from these directed contributions was over \$3,700! As these contributions are confidential, we are unable to thank each donor individually – so please accept this big group HUG in appreciation. If you have any questions or require additional information, do not hesitate to contact our office!

THANKS TO OUR BIDDERS!

Over the past several months, Children at Risk has offered donated Sens Playoff Tickets, Concert Tickets and Silent Auction packages for bidding. We want to express our appreciation to our families and friends for supporting these fundraising ventures. Look for upcoming announcements on Ottawa Senators 2007/2008 game season tickets to bid on!

MACMILLAN'S FROZEN FOODS CAMPAIGN

EXCITING NEWS!! MacMillan's has just announced that they can deliver their delicious cookie dough, muffin mix, pizzas, pies, cakes, specialty holiday items (and more) WITH a selection of PEANUT-FREE products! Approved by the Anaphylactic Society, you will see a listing on the enclosed flyer for these quality products. In addition, their regular muffin mixes are now Trans Fat Free – with the cookie dough in January! Orders must be submitted to Children at Risk by Monday, **November 5**, with delivery on Wednesday, **November 21** (payments made to Children at Risk). Don't hesitate to contact us for more flyers – these are great to pass around the office and workplace!

FUNDRAISING UPDATE (Cont'd)

MARK YOUR CALENDARS ...

- 2007/2008 Entertainment Coupon Books September/October
- 12th Annual Celebrity-Carved Pumpkin Contest..... October 25-27
- Fall MacMillan's Foods CampaignNovember 5
- Ottawa 67's 50/50 Ticket Sales March 2008
- 7th Annual "Rockin' for Risk" 50s/60s/70s Dance April 12, 2008

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING SPONSORSHIPS

Starting in our December quarterly newsletter, we are inviting local businesses to "advertise" their services with us. We will be running pages at the end of our newsletter that can accommodate a business-card size ad for only \$25 per edition. We ask that you electronically supply any graphics or logos, plus text that is to be included. Ads can be ready to place or we can construct a simple ad from text supplied. We recognize that many of our families in the Autism community have retail businesses and/or home-based ventures, and this advertising would not only offer them exposure as well as an opportunity to fund some of our newsletter mailing costs! (Note: Children at Risk mails 2 editions per year in March and September, and emails 2 editions per year in June and December to over 300 families). Our newsletter is also posted for public viewing on our website at www.childrenatrisk.ca.

HIGH-NEEDS SOCIAL SKILLS FRIENDSHIP GROUP SURVEY

Many of you in the Autism Community are aware that Children at Risk has been working diligently to procure funding in order to offer social/recreational groups for higher-needs ASD children. The response has been excellent – with funding coming soon from **HOPE, Unity for Autism and the Community Foundation of Ottawa.**

Children at Risk recognizes that the structure and implementation of these group supports will be significantly different than what we have currently in place for our Social Skill Therapy Groups. With this in mind, we are not only going to consult professionals for curriculum/group content but we want to hear from YOU, the parents! Enclosed you will find a short survey in order to have your feedback and incorporate what you are looking for/what works for you into this program.

Our Board of Directors is very excited about being able to address yet another "gap in services" - but we want to do it right! Help us to help you by letting us know your needs. Take a few minutes to fill out the enclosed survey (you can mail it, fax it or email it back to Children at Risk) or go on-line to complete it at www.childrenatrisk.ca. Please feel free to distribute it to other families, schools, and groups. Responses are requested by September 30, 2007.

DONOR'S CORNER

- Steven & Michelle McRoberts.....\$300.00
- Greco Martial Arts & Fitness.....\$300.00
- Stanislaw Kawczak Family Fund.....\$387.00
- Bell Canada Employees Fund.....\$494.00
- Kiwanis Club of Rideau (another)\$1,000.00
- United Way Directed Donations\$3,734.43

THANK YOU TO ELAINE AND SHERI!

*Submitted by April Copelli
(Mom to Luka and Aidan, both diagnosed with ASD)*

When my oldest son Luka, four years old, was diagnosed in March with Autism Spectrum Disorder we were shocked. We knew "some things" were not quite right, but the big AUTISM word never came to mind.

The weeks that followed for me were filled with the daunting task of finding all the help he would need in order to develop and succeed. I had been given a contact sheet from Luka's psychologist, but where to begin? Speech therapy – yes, Occupational therapy – yes...the list goes on. But the one area I wanted to find help for him the most was with his social skills. Watching him turn his back while other children played around him or seeing him not quite know "how to mix" with other children was heartbreaking.

Any group I called had been cancelled for lack of funding, or interest, or he was simply too young to participate. I tried family support groups to at least expose him to other children like himself and, again, they were no longer active for varied reasons. Then I spoke to Brenda when I called Children At Risk. She told me there was a group just for children like Luka, he was age appropriate and that he'd be matched with others of a similar level on the spectrum as himself. I thought could this really be true? After so many disappointments, it just seemed too good to be true. However, there *was* one catch...the next session wasn't running until the fall. (Remember I was calling around for help during early spring).

So we waited, went through the interview process with Elaine who was so informative and made Luka feel so at ease. Then Brenda called to say Luka was accepted into the fall session. We were thrilled! He was now months into his other therapies but this sounded like something that would not only meet his needs, but would also be FUN!

I must say the wait was so worth it! We walked in last Saturday for his first group and we felt so welcomed by Elaine and Sheri. I was impressed by the room's set-up, the program plan, organization and the amazing group size.

The girls approached Luka in such a welcoming way and made him feel totally at ease with this new situation. He had a wonderful time and even after just one session, I noticed him using phrases in his play later on that very day that I'd never heard him say before. That was so rewarding, we were very proud of him!

THANK YOU TO ELAINE AND SHERI! (Cont'd)

Thank You Children At Risk for this wonderful program. I know it takes so much work to facilitate such a group. This Social Skills Group offers everything we wanted for Luka...AND MORE. I wanted to take a moment to thank both Elaine and Sheri for giving their Saturdays to help each child in this group. Your dedication is truly changing young lives.

We, personally, have two small children who were both diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder this year. Though it can be overwhelming at times, groups like this give us real promise that there are very dedicated people out there who can help our kids move forward and succeed. I know I speak for every parent, who has a child in this social skills group, when I say that we are so grateful for this program. Each child in this small group is so very special in his or her own way and, Elaine and Sheri, you are helping them shine!

CONGRATULATIONS TO HEATHER!

"More Than a Mom" recently won a Bronze in the 2007 Independent Publishers Awards (Women's Issues Category). It was also a finalist in the 2006 Mom's Choice Awards (Adult Books/Non-Fiction) and the Best Books 2006 Awards (Parenting/Family General Category). Since publication it has received positive reviews from the American Psychological Association, Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, ADVANCE for physical therapists and PT assistants, Autism Ontario, Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy, Autism-Asperger's Digest Magazine, Federation for Children with Special Needs, ADDitude magazine, Tourette Syndrome Association and Muscular Dystrophy Association to name a few.

"More Than a Mom: Living a Full and Balanced Life When Your Child Has Special Needs," Woodbine House, 2006, co-authored by **Amy Baskin and Heather Fawcett** can be purchased at Chapters, ordered through its Canadian distributor Monarch Books 1-800-404-7404 and is also available from Heather at info@morethanamom.net.



**STONEBRIDGE'S SECOND ANNUAL
CHARITY FALL FOLLIES GOLF
TOURNAMENT**

Saturday, October 13th, 2007
9:30am 18-Hole Shotgun



This is a unique golf event with all proceeds benefiting Children at Risk. Each hole will have a FUN and/or distinctive golfing challenge. The emphasis is on fun (this is not a competitive tournament) and this is a perfect event for mixed couples and/or golfers that are new to the game. The tournament is a scramble format and you can sign-up as an individual, twosome, threesome or foursome (first come first served, limit of 144 players). The entry fee for the tournament is \$50 per person and it includes Continental Breakfast, a souvenir gift, a hearty buffet lunch and prizes. In addition to the tournament entry fee a green fee of \$40 per person is payable. Please note: green fees are not payable until the day of the tournament. If you have any questions or require additional information, please call Brenda Reisch at 613-741-8255 or contact Cheryl McHardy at info@stonebridgegc.com.

**AUTISM THROUGH THE LIFESPAN
CONFERENCE**

Nov 2 - 3, 2007 – Ottawa, Ontario

Featuring: **Dr. Jeff Bradstreet, Jed Baker Ph.D., Julia Berle, Stephen Shore, Ed.D., Bill Davis, Valerie Paradiz Ph.D., Stan Kurtz and Lori Knowles.**

Experience two incredible days that will give you ways to enhance communication and social behavior in the home, classroom, or clinical setting immediately! You will not want to miss these fascinating presentations by some of the most highly regarded experts in the field of Communication, Behavior and Biomedical for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

Check out the following link for full details:
<http://www.autismtoday.com/ottawa2007.htm>



**CAPITAL CHORDETTES
HITS, GLITZ AND ROCK & ROLL**
Presented by Capital Chordettes, Inc.
Saturday, October 13, 2007 at 7:30 p.m.

Over 70 voices will fill Centrepointheatre in a special evening of choral music. This variety musical event will showcase the Capital Chordettes' chorus and quartets and will feature "Polaris", a special guest comedy men's quartet.

The Capital Chordettes, Inc., a women's barbershop chorus is celebrating 44 years of entertaining audiences in the National Capital region with their acapella, four-part harmony. The chorus currently has 70 members under the direction of Carolyn Henderson. The chorus represents Ottawa-Carleton at competitions with other choruses across Canada and the United States. In April 2007, the chorus placed second at the Area Contest held in the Ottawa region, which qualified them to continue to the International Contest in London, Ontario in November.

Polaris is a very popular and busy quartet that entertains audiences at commercial/corporate performances, public shows, and private shows in the Outaouais Region as well as throughout Eastern Ontario, Western Quebec, New York State and Nova Scotia. With smooth vocal stylings and their own brand of humour, Polaris has become a shining example of fun and fellowship in the barbershop world.

Single Tickets on sale date: To Be Announced.

Tickets	Orchestra	Balcony
Single Tickets	\$25	\$23

www.capitalchordettes.org

For tickets, go to www.centrepointheatre.com or call 613-580-2700 for the Box Office.

SOUTH NEPEAN AUTISM CENTRE (SNAC)

Dreams can come true! The Barrhaven community has recently worked with local businesses and community members to raise funds for a 2 day/week afternoon drop-in for Autistic children 0-5 years of age. The sessions will take place at the Barrhaven Child Care Centre on Kennevale Drive. Varied raffle and bbq fundraising events culminated with a dinner/auction on Friday, September 14, where an anniversary celebration by **Kelly & Ken Ross of Ross Your Independent Grocer** resulted in over \$20,000 to-date raised to support this program.

MC'd by A-Channel's Lianne Liang, this event included community leaders like **Linda & Steve Warne, Lisa MacLeod (MPP Nepean-Carlton), Laurel Gibbons, Scotiabank and Mattamy Homes**. Congratulations to those involved with this local initiative – may this inspire other communities to do the same!

SNAC REGISTRATION/GRAND OPENING

Barrhaven Child Care Centre will hold Registration for the SNAC-South Nepean Autistic Centre on Thursday September 27th, 2:30-5:00pm. at 56 Kennevale Drive, in Barrhaven. SNAC will hold sessions for families of children with Autism, who are 0-5 years of age. For further information contact **Dale O'Reilly** at 613-825-9385 Ext.14.

The goal of the South Nepean Autism Centre is to support families and provide networking for them with other families in the South Nepean area, while providing a safe and appropriate environment for their children's needs. A Behavior Consultant will be available on site to provide parents with information on general behaviour management strategies for their child. Specialists will be invited monthly to provide more in-depth information on language/communication, fine/gross motor needs, self help and playskills strategies.

This program will provide two hour sessions twice a week for three months, starting on October 2 until December 20 2007 every Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 1-3 p.m.

The grand opening will take place on October 2 from 12:00 (noon) until 12:30 p.m.

EXCELLENT MARTIAL ARTS PROGRAM

Submitted by Rosy Arena-Ryan and Valerie Angus



Patrick Ryan and **Wesley Angus** have been participating in an excellent martial arts program run through the Merivale YM-YWCA in conjunction with the Tae E. Lee school. Patrick has been involved for over 5 years and Wesley for 4 years. The benefits go far beyond the physical coordination and strength the boys develop. Their self-esteem and confidence grows with each belt level they achieve. The school is very accommodating and the class is specifically for special needs. It runs every Sat. afternoon from fall through spring. They also have the opportunity each spring to participate in a school-wide competition at Algonquin College, in the special needs category. We highly recommend it. Call the Merivale YM-YWCA to register your child. The first session runs Sept. 15 - Dec. 15 and it's never too late to join.

Nancy Haans

RCP Coordinator
Ottawa Chapter

613.230.6305

nancy@autismontario.com



AutismONTARIO.com



REALIZE COMMUNITY
POTENTIAL PROGRAM

For information on upcoming events check out
AutismOntario.com.

Michele Stedman embodies the title of her first book.

A science fiction fan with a softness for animals, the 19-year-old Aberdeen resident has set out on a journey to help others understand a syndrome that has affected nearly every aspect of her life since birth.

She recently published “It’s Good To Be Different!,” a children’s book that looks at her life dealing with Asperger’s syndrome, a high functioning form of autism.

The young author has become well versed with the effects of the syndrome since she was officially diagnosed with it as a 16-year-old. “It’s a neurological disease where you are very inept with your social skills and have a normal to above normal IQ,” she said. “Mine is about normal when it comes to memory, but not with the comprehension part. Social cues are a problem and you can be very obsessive/compulsive.”

Not one to shy away from discussing her syndrome, Michele has taken her story on the road around the state and the Twin Harbors, promoting her book and speaking at several venues about her life with the syndrome. She has sold about 200 copies of her book so far and plans to hold some book signing events soon. The aim of her book is to educate others and help those living with the syndrome cope, as well as understand more about herself.

“I needed to teach people about the syndrome so they could treat me like a normal person,” Michele said. “There are people who tease me for being different. This was to help me understand it more and to help others understand it more.” She started writing the book her junior year at Ocosta High School.

A chance meeting with Scott Cummings, an illustrator who was living in California when Michele went there on a family visit, enabled her to meld her words with corresponding images in the pages of her book. As a senior, Michele was required to do a senior project, so she decided to get her book published as part of the project.

Her first attempt at hiring an agent did not pan out, but she soon found a representative through the self-publishing company AuthorHouse.com. The company walks a new author “through every step of the self publishing process, from cover design and page layout to distribution and marketing,” according to the company’s Web site.

Her mother, Dana Stedman, who is the Ocosta Elementary School principal, said the book is geared toward children, but is also informative for parents and teachers as it brings to light the day-to-day challenges of the syndrome. “I’m really proud of her,” Dana said. “She’s had to overcome a ton of obstacles and has had to work really hard to do what she’s doing ... I don’t care if she sold a copy. The book made her feel like she was important. I don’t think she felt like she mattered, and this made her feel like she mattered. As a mom, that’s all I care about. I just want her to be happy.”

Michele said she has received a positive reception from those who have read her book or listened to her speak. At Michele’s recent speaking engagement at the Westport Timberland Library, her appearance prompted several people to show an eagerness to purchase it or check out a copy from the library, according to Kathleen Ringenberg, the Westport Community Library Supervisor. She said at least one woman bought the book for a family member who was dealing with similar difficulties.

“We were really impressed with her attitude and that she is so aware of her situation and open about it,” the library supervisor said. Ringenberg reviewed the book for Michele, who was a volunteer at the library for about a year.

Because the book is geared toward the juvenile reading level, “it is a great way for children who have a problem to realize they are not the only ones and that you can learn to manage those difficulties,” Ringenberg said. “I think it’s helpful for other people who have children to help them understand that it’s good to be different and accept that.”

Obstacles to overcome

Michele’s family raised her in a household that embraced differences and promoted individuality.

“In our house, we said that weird is good,” her mother said. “It is fun to be weird, because it is never boring. We tried to make it a positive thing and stressed that it is OK not to be like everyone else. I think that’s why she came up with the title of her book.”

Michele had noticeable developmental and social differences from infancy. She didn’t say her first word — “Bear,” after a stuffed bear she has to this day — until she was 3 years old and didn’t learn to ride a bicycle until she was 8. Her physical coordination, articulation and speech abilities were delayed, but her family, doctors and the school system had a hard time pinpointing why.

After several behavioral and neurological assessments in her early teens, Michele was officially diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome by a psychologist at the Mary Bridge Children’s Hospital in Tacoma when she was 16. There is no cure for the syndrome.

Dana, who used to be a special education teacher, said that such late diagnosis is common, because children exhibit the syndrome in different ways. “Michele was quite relieved to know what it was,” Dana said. “She started doing research and could adapt and adjust that she was just different ... She could have decided to fold and give up, but she decided she wanted to live. She chose to survive it and came out the other end pretty darn cool.”

The effects of the syndrome come out in various ways with Michele, all of which are common with a person with Asperger’s syndrome. At school, she excels in subjects that rely heavily on memory, but struggles with math and English, especially when the subjects deal with comprehension exercises.

Social cues a problem

She has a hard time understanding social cues and it is difficult for her to form a close relationship with others. As a result, Michele said she has not had many close friends.

Dana said her daughter has a hard time communicating her feelings and doesn’t attach intimately with others.

“Michele is very easygoing,” she said. “There’s not a lot that ruffles her feathers. She’s really likable, but doesn’t know how to deal with other people all the time.”

She also becomes repetitive at times. Sometimes she is able to realize it and stop herself, but others times, someone has to give a “one, two” count and make her realize she is doing it.

Another visible effect of the syndrome comes when she gets excited about something. She will flap her hands up near her ears and shift her feet and legs around, again without realizing it all the time. Personal hygiene is difficult for Michele to grasp and she often has to be reminded of good habits, Dana said.

She often fixates on small injuries while failing to register the harm of a larger incident. “If I get a hang nail, I’ll throw a hissy fit,” Michele said. “But if I fall on the bus, I won’t really start complaining about it for awhile.”

An example is when a 60-pound weight fell on her during a physical education class. She went through several class periods before finally reporting the injury. She included this example in her book to demonstrate to her readers how she experiences physical pain.

“I tied it in by saying I feel small pains a lot more and big pains a lot less,” she said.

“There are some fabulous people who care a lot about Michele,” Dana said.

However, dealing with the syndrome isn’t always easy for the family.

“It creates a whole lot of stress,” Dana said. “There’s been a lot of sleepless nights, a lot of tears.”

Although Michele said she has adjusted fairly well to living with the syndrome, she does get angry sometimes. When this happens, she said she usually takes it out by throwing a stuffed animal to vent her anger. She is currently being treated for depression, which is a common side effect of such syndromes.

She has also learned other ways of coping, such as writing in a journal, trying to talk out her feelings and writing lists of positive attributes.

Not always understanding

People aren’t always understanding about Michele’s syndrome. “It was difficult going to school,” she said. “People would tease me for being different. They were mean about it, like with what they said.”

An instance of someone being rude to Michele was when a fellow student called her a “flapper” when he saw her excited movements, she said.

Looking ahead

Michele, whose family lived in several Eastern Washington towns before settling down in Westport, has found a new place to call home in Aberdeen.

Dana said Michele has shown huge improvements in dealing with her syndrome. “That’s why she’s on her own,” Dana said. “She’s becoming capable of being independent.”

Michele has attended classes at Grays Harbor College since the fall, taking a math and English course and has enjoyed it there so far. She works part-time as a janitor for St. Andrews Episcopal Church, which she also attends. She even has her first boyfriend, a fellow college student who shares her interest in high action video games.

Michele and Chad Barbishe, 23, of Aberdeen, met when he helped her with her lock on her locker, according to Chad. His plan to ask her on a date was passed through the grapevine to Michele, who agreed to go to a football game, dinner and a movie with him for their first date.

“It was kind of fate,” he said.

Chad is also one of many encouraging her to continue writing.

“I think it’s amazing that she had the idea to write a book and, you know, just the book itself,” he said.

Michele plans to write a second, longer book about dealing with Asperger’s syndrome as an adult.

My Thoughts on Aspergians Making Use of Their Intelligence and Learning and Achieving as Much as They Can

by Jonathan Davies

Making Use of My Intelligence

Even if I was still as socially inept as I was 25 years ago, I would still want to be in situations in which I could learn about things that I am capable of learning and things that interest me, and in which I would have the opportunity to make use of my intelligence.

I also want to be able to make use of my intelligence even if I can't multitask or process information quickly. Since I learned good social skills, at least I have done simple work out in the community, rather than in a sheltered handicapped environment, which has given me more opportunity to learn about what goes on out in the community, and to be around more advanced and more stimulating people. However, **even out in the community, I don't want to have to do only very simple things just because I can't multitask or process information quickly.**

Now, having said that even if I was still as socially inept as I was 25 years ago, I would still want to be in situations that give me opportunities to make use of my intelligence, I should also say that in this scenario, I would **want to learn good social skills as well, as soon as possible.** However, **even within the time it took to learn good social skills, I would want to be in situations in which I would have opportunities to learn about other important things, and to make use of the skills, knowledge, and intelligence that I have already, so that, 1) I wouldn't be bored, and, 2) by the time I learned good social skills, I would have other skills that I need as well.**

Learning to Socialize Appropriately

My social behaviour has always tended to improve when I was told what is appropriate to do and say in the situation I was in. For example, I was able to attend a regular high school because, 1) they thought that I was capable of progressing academically enough, and 2) although I wasn't very socially skilled at the time, at least I behaved as appropriately as I had to in order to be in that situation, once I knew how I had to behave in that situation. I didn't have to be as socially skilled to be in high school (even a regular one) as you do in the work world. However, **the fact that I behaved as appropriately as I had to in high school is actually an indication that, once I was told how I had to behave in a given situation, I would act accordingly.**

For many years after high school, I was in situations in which if I wasn't behaving appropriately enough for that situation already, it was game over for me right then and there. I think that for many years, people gave up on me much too easily! **I was always capable of changing once I was told what things are appropriate to do and say in the situation I was in.** The situations in which I ran into problems and/or failed to make much progress were those in which nobody told me what was appropriate to do or say in that situation. **When in school, I behaved as appropriately as I had to, both because if I was in a situation I wanted to be in, I had an incentive to behave a certain way once I realized that I had to behave a certain way, and because once they told me what was appropriate in that situation, I knew better.**

When in a sheltered handicapped environment, which came *after* graduating from a regular high school, and *even after* a year at Algonquin College, if and when they noticed me doing something inappropriate, they would tell me to stop doing it because it was inappropriate. However, even then they still **didn't tell me what was *appropriate*.** For that reason, **after I stopped doing one thing after being told that it was inappropriate, I was more likely to replace it with something else that was inappropriate than to replace it with what was appropriate.** Another thing was that while they got me to pay attention to and interact with the other participants, they also wanted me to focus on things that were very boring and simple, and didn't give me a chance to learn about things that interested me or things that concerned me. This caused me to get very bored, as you can probably imagine.

My Thoughts on Aspergians Making Use of Their Intelligence and Learning and Achieving as Much as They Can

(Cont'd)

It would have been fine for people to get me to pay attention to and interact with others around me if at the same time, I had been able to learn about things that interested me and/or things that concerned me, and especially if I had been taught things that I needed to learn in order to be successful in life (e.g. how to make a good résumé, what to do and say in an interview, the importance of having good eye contact when speaking to someone else, what to say to someone else if I wanted to have good rapport with him/her). It would have also been much better if the other people around me had been socially appropriate enough for me to learn from the right examples, because if the others around me were no more socially appropriate than I was (not to mention even less so), I would not have the right examples to emulate or learn from, and could therefore be led astray by them, or at best, not start to do any better than I was doing already.

If All Aspergians Were Given Every Chance to Learn as Much as They Can

If all Aspergians (people with Asperger's Syndrome) were given every chance to learn as much as they can, we might find that some would progress more than others, and there might be a variety of reasons for that. However, in this scenario, **we would have a better idea of how much potential each one has, and we would also have a better idea of what each of these individuals would want in life once they learned enough to know what there is for them to want in life.** In this scenario, Aspergians would likely be judged more on the basis of the amount of potential they have, and what they want in life (at least once they knew what there is for them to want in life), rather than merely on the basis of how appropriately or inappropriately they behave *before* they are given every chance to learn as much as they can.

Aspergians Having Friends with A.D.D.

I think it might be a good idea for Aspergians to have friends who have A.D.D. (Attention Deficit Disorder), because if they have friends who are A.D.D.ers (a term I made up for people with A.D.D.), they will get the intellectual stimulation they desire from them, since A.D.D.ers, like Aspergians, generally have average or even above average intelligence, plus Aspergians are likely to learn to socialize better from A.D.D.ers, since A.D.D.ers already know how to socialize better than Aspergians (at least unless and until the latter learn to socialize well).

There is one A.D.D.er whom I have been friends with for many years, and from the time she crossed my path back in 1983, I always knew that I needed a friend who was as advanced as she is (both intellectually and socially) to become more mature and learn to socialize better myself. Even if a friend who is at my A.D.D.er friend's level was a member of the same sex, although he wouldn't be a potential marriage partner for me, at least I would get the intellectual stimulation that I always desired, and I would have learned to socialize better from him, and I would have had a friend with whom I would be able to do things that are fun and exciting.

When I didn't have good social skills, I had far more opportunities to connect with and interact with those who had schizophrenia than with those who had things like A.D.D., but the more I think about it, the more I know that I would have benefited far more from connecting with and interacting with the latter than with the former.

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September 14, 2007

Charity sector faces unprecedented challenges, leaders tell volunteers

William Lin, Ottawa Citizen

Despite statistics that show Canadians are among the most generous in aiding charities, non-profit groups still face unprecedented challenges, several leaders in the sector said Thursday evening.

Every year, about 22 million Canadians donate a total of \$9 billion to charitable causes, while a smaller number offer two billion hours of volunteer time, said Teri Kirk, vice-president of Imagine Canada, an advocacy group for non-profit organizations.

Still, there is little legislation regulating, nor a minister responsible for, the voluntary sector, she said.

"It's very much a low point in voluntary sector-government relations," she said.

"It's not a sector that ranks high on the public policy agenda" of the current government, Ms. Kirk added.

Ms. Kirk and other non-profit group directors spoke yesterday at a panel session headed by Penny Collette, who will be the Liberal candidate for the federal riding of Ottawa Centre in the next election.

Another challenge is that the volunteering habits of Canadians have changed over the years, said Brian Tardif, executive director of Citizen Advocacy of Ottawa, which links up volunteers with people with disabilities.

Over the years, a trend has developed where people view volunteering as a short-term task, rather than repeated work, he said.

"It's not a short-term task," Mr. Tardif said of his group's volunteer work, adding that people today seem to be distracted by more preoccupations.

His group, which has existed for 31 years, faces the same challenges as other groups: increasing public awareness of their work.

"We struggle because there's a huge demand for volunteers, and (because of) donor fatigue," he said.

One man attending the talk worried about what he saw as a trend toward fewer people volunteering.

But even with such challenges, Ottawans tend to be more charity-minded than those in other parts of Canada, according to a Community Foundation of Ottawa report released last year

In 2004, 31.3 per cent of Ottawans filing tax returns made a charitable donation, compared to 27.7 per cent across Ontario and 25 per cent across Canada.

That same year, 59 per cent of Ottawa residents over 15 volunteered an average of 158 hours, compared to 45 per cent of Canadians volunteering a slightly larger average 168 hours.

MANY THANKS TO CHILDREN AT RISK'S MANY VOLUNTEERS!



