

Thinking Differently

The quarterly newsletter of Autism New Zealand Inc.



Respite care RESULTS OF OUR SURVEY

As many of you are more than aware, there is a serious lack of respite care in New Zealand for families with children who have disabilities. Here at Autism NZ, we want to change that!

cannot be carried over from one year to the next. It shows that our members are having to use other services just to get a break.

For example, some of you said:

"We have used the care to allow for my husband and I to have some time alone. The care has been always through a family friend."

"It gives me and my husband the only opportunity to talk to each other, so is invaluable for our relationship."

"Having a weekend to ourselves – my husband and I benefit from being on our own, even just having someone help while we go to a meeting."

- 52.8% of respondents so far say they don't have access to respite care.

When we asked our members what the most essential features of respite care were to them and what services they feel Autism NZ should be involved in, they said that:

- the top five most essential features for respite care are:
 - safety for the client – 17.9%
 - appropriately trained staff – 16.5%
 - communication between staff and families – 15.1%
 - regular respite in a consistent environment – 14.75%
 - engagement in appropriate activities – 14.3%
- the services that Autism NZ should be involved in are:
 - holiday programmes – 36.1%
 - short-term respite care – 30.3%
 - after school programmes – 23.5%.

Other comments received throughout the survey underpin the desperate need for respite care services.

Some examples – which you can all probably relate to – are below:

"Great that you are looking into this. I am sure it is an issue in our area - and it must be in other areas also. Families desperately need time out – as do siblings. And the family member with ASD needs a place where they can feel safe and listened to – this encourages some independence."

"It would be very helpful if there was an outreach programme to encourage reluctant kids to attend (e.g. introductions so that they know one or two others beforehand). As parents we're desperate for respite, but it is hard to get son to leave the house!"

"We experience unpredictable cyclic problems. I often feel desperate for emergency respite, that is, to be able to drop son off immediately without notice, to prevent harm to himself, us, siblings and our home."

We're ready to talk shop with Government

It is obvious that our members are desperate for respite care and we understand the struggles you have to go through to even get out of the house with your partner or friends just to go shopping or see a movie!

We will be looking at the results of our survey in more depth and using these findings to lobby the Ministry of Health on your behalf. Watch this space.

If you have any specific questions you would like to put to Government, check out the **Ask the Government your questions** story on page 2.

We have recently surveyed 2034 of our members via email to gauge your thoughts about the lack of respite care. Thanks to those of you who took the time to respond. Your answers will go a long way towards getting our message across to Government.

Questions included whether you currently receive respite services, the type and frequency of services you receive, what you think works well and what doesn't, what the essential features of an excellent respite service would be, whether Autism NZ should be providing respite services for people with an ASD, and much more.

Topline results

Here are some topline statistics, which we must say are very concerning to us:

- 47.2% of respondents so far say they have access to respite care. This varies from holiday programmes run by Autism NZ to an hour of care here and there. ALL of the 47.2% of respondents so far have indicated that the respite care available to them is NOT adequate.
- It is interesting to note that most respondents use their carer support hours as their 'respite' care. However, this is not considered respite care as such; rather, it assists the unpaid full-time carer to take a break from caring for that person with a disability. It is extremely difficult for members to find carers to use this resource, so it often goes unused as hours





Welcome

Due to the pressures of deadlines, I am writing this while still on my Christmas holidays. The last 12 months have been extremely busy and while we have had some successes, we still have a long way to go.

This is an election year and we will be hearing a lot from our politicians over the next seven to eight months. They will be competing for our votes, making promises and shaking hands. The issues that will concern them are the ones that are shouted the loudest and we should remember that with one in 100 people in New Zealand on the spectrum, the number of voters who have personal contact with the condition is significant.

If we choose to work together to use this combined voice, the politicians will have no choice but to listen. We have plans to bring together as many autism organisations as we can to achieve a few simple (but key) messages, which we can all use to strengthen this voice.

I always find a new year to be an exciting time, full of possibilities and challenges. This year we have a much clearer sense

of how to turn the possibilities into reality. This includes bringing our members more seminars and more learning opportunities than ever before. We have a range of great speakers and events planned, starting with a visit from Australia by the team from **Minds & Hearts** in a few weeks' time (see page 7). They will be visiting four centres throughout the country and I hope you'll be able to attend.

We have had a number of changes to staff in Auckland and Waikato and I am also very excited that we have had great conversations with members in Taupo and the Wairarapa about increased support in those areas. We are working with Taupo Autistic Spectrum Support and have a new staff member on the ground to look after members in this region. We are also looking forward to a number of events in the Wairarapa over the next few months.

A further improvement to the work of Autism NZ is the increasing support of

some community-focused and caring companies. Slingshot has been fantastic over the past two years and their contribution is continuing to grow. I can now announce that Whitcoulls has also come on board for this year's Annual Appeal Week in June and we look forward to announcing details of a new major relationship with a real estate firm in the near future. The support of these companies helps us to help you and I ask that every member keep in mind these companies and the support they are giving to your organisation.

By the time you read this, the Christmas holidays will be a memory and the sand will have been washed from at least the majority of my clothes, but I hope that the time spent relaxing will have allowed us all to recharge our batteries and get ready for what will be a very exciting 2011.

- Alison Molloy, CE Autism NZ

Ask the Government your questions...

Your questions, straight to the top

With John Key's announcement of the November general election date, all the political parties will soon be announcing the platforms and policies they will base their 2011 campaigns on. With the major parties focusing on generating votes, there is an opportunity for those of us involved with the autism cause to ask politicians about their ASD policies.

We would like to let our readers know about the differing policies each major party has regarding autism, and what we can expect from them if they get into government.

The problem is: What do we ask them?

We would like to know what matters to you, our members and readers, who are directly affected by ASD. So please submit the questions about ASD policy that you would like to hear answered. Hopefully, together we can make a difference.

Send your questions to:
matt.frost@autismnz.org.nz

Canterbury Branch Walk/Run 4 Autism

The earthquake of 4 September last year, and the seemingly endless aftershocks, has left many families struggling to come to terms with things and unable to get back to everyday life. Despite this, there was a great turnout for the 2nd Annual Walk/Run 4 Autism Awareness Fun Run on 31 October, in Hagley Park.



The day started out a bit overcast and chilly, but that didn't dampen anybody's enthusiasm and people were soon running or walking 2.5km, 5km or 10km.

This year's run was a great success, and has encouraged us not only to continue and develop the event in Canterbury, but also to help take the event to the national level.

Many thanks to everyone who took part this year, especially to CEO Alison Molloy and Board member Wendy Duff, both of whom flew down especially for the day.

We will be doing it all again in 2011, hopefully around November, so pencil it in your diaries!



Parent's Voice –

Gina Howarth talks about her son Ben

They say a mother's intuition shouldn't be taken lightly and when Gina Howarth of Levin gave birth to her son Ben, her intuition was right on the button.

"To be honest, I knew from the minute Ben was born that something wasn't right (for want of a better word)," says Ben's mum, Gina. "Although I was a first time mum and had no other child to compare him to, I just had this feeling there was something different about him."

Over the following six months or so, Gina became more concerned.

"I remember one day when Ben was about eight months old and he was playing on the mat," says Gina. "He was flapping his hands really fast and I thought, 'That's a bit weird'. There was something in his face and the way he was doing it that made me think he might be autistic."

As any mother would, Gina decided to do some research and went straight online to find out all she could about autism.

"I think my husband thought I was going a bit over the top," says Gina. "But the more I read, the more I could see that I might be right. I needed to get the evidence to convince others that I wasn't going mad!"

It didn't help that when Gina mentioned the likelihood of Ben being on the spectrum to a health professional she was told, "Don't mention the 'A' word. Everyone thinks their child has autism nowadays."

By the time Ben had reached 18 months, he still wasn't speaking, only making grunting sounds, and his fine motor skills were not developing at all.

"Ben's pre-school teacher mentioned that she thought he may have hearing problems and offered to write a referral to Plunket for a speech language therapist," Gina recalls. "The assessment found that there were a few 'red flags' pointing to autism but I was told not to worry about it at this stage."

Although the 'red flags' validated Gina's 'intuition', she still didn't think she was being taken seriously enough.

At two years of age, Ben still wasn't talking.

"He would hold his hands over his ears and hum, he would spin around in circles looking at his hand and he had a habit of banging his head against the ground," says Gina. "So I took him to the GP."

Once again, Gina didn't really receive the response she needed and after explaining Ben's behaviours she was told, "I'm sure he'll be fine."

"The thing is, Ben (like most people on the spectrum) looks like a normal little boy and is very sociable. He is receptive and understands everything we say to him," says Gina. "But his behaviour and abilities are so different from his peers I was getting to a point where I was too embarrassed to take him to play group because of the way people looked at him, and me."

In the end, Gina took Ben to a paediatrician, who confirmed that Ben was indeed on the spectrum, although she is still waiting for an 'official' diagnosis even now – Ben is nearly six years old.

"I had a bit of a meltdown after that because I just didn't know what to say when people asked me about Ben," she says.

Gina and her husband are now receiving the support they need through the child development team and Ben is attending school full time with a fully funded teacher aid.

"They've been great," says Gina. "There is also an itinerant teacher who comes in once a week to ensure the curriculum is adapted for Ben. I feel we are very lucky with the funding we have received, a lot luckier than many other special needs kids."

Ben's language development has come on by leaps and bounds too.

"There was a time that I was convinced, no matter how many people told me he would eventually talk, that he would never be verbal," recalls Gina. "But when he was about four and a half, suddenly his words came, which was a big relief. Although he still has difficulty and his expressive language is limited, we are seeing improvements all the time."

Ben also has an occupational therapist who visits him at home to help develop his fine motor skills.

"He can't really hold a pencil to draw or write his name and has trouble stabbing food with a fork," says Gina. "But we're working through it."

It hasn't been an easy road for Gina and her family. She and Dave also have twins, who are younger than Ben, called Maddie and Alex, so that makes for a busy family!

"But we're getting there now," she says. "There are always going to be ups and downs, but the more I learn about autism, the more I can adapt things to make it easier for Ben."

Over the last two years, Gina has been studying to become a nurse, which is proving quite useful.

"With a child on the spectrum, you end up having to be an occupational therapist, a nurse and a psychologist," she says. "So, I've certainly got the nursing side of things on track. It's different, though, when it's your own child. So I do rely on the professionals when I need to!"



Left to right: Maddie, Alex and Ben

HELP US MAKE A DIFFERENCE

with any type of support you can give



Charity organisations, such as Autism NZ, can only exist because of the support and commitment of a wide range of people and organisations who make the organisation work through the help they provide. These include our staff, who are passionate about the job they do and the people they help, our volunteers, who work tirelessly on committees, boards and in many other ways, donors, who provide the financial support that is absolutely vital, and organisations, who value and aid the work that Autism NZ does in the community. We would like to introduce you to a few of these wonderful supporters and the different ways they help us out.

Donations by direct debit

Kevin Berry, a Christchurch-based software engineer, became aware of Autism NZ after his son was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome.

"We were initially referred to the organisation as a place for support and resources," explains Kevin. "We found them to be really helpful; there is always a lot of information and through the library and training courses we've learnt quite a lot."

Initially, Kevin had been donating to other organisations, but on learning that Autism NZ is an independent charity, dependent on the generosity of individuals and organisations, he started to donate.

"I set up a direct debit which comes out once a month; it's very straightforward," says Kevin. "With the stretched resources they have, I think the work they do is very good. I will continue to support them, helping out with annual appeals and other events they may have."

Donations through payroll giving

At the start of last year, the Government changed the law to give employees an immediate tax credit if they donated money to charities directly from their pay packet. Ros Coote was one of thousands of New Zealanders to sign on to the scheme, with her charity of choice being Autism NZ.

"It's been so easy," explains Ros. "I can go into my work intranet and see on my latest payslip exactly how much I've donated. It also shows how much I've received in tax credits."

The Payroll Giving Scheme, offered by employers who sign on, works by calculating tax credits at \$0.33 cents for

each dollar you donate. This means that if you donate \$10 your net pay will only be reduced by \$6.67, with the remainder coming from the tax you would otherwise be paying.

"It's a really great scheme. I would never have gone through the rigmarole of applying for a tax credit, but having it done automatically through my employer was a real bonus," says Ros.

"Since my sister was diagnosed with Asperger's, I know that Autism NZ is the right place for me to be donating to. I'll definitely continue to support them - especially since it's so easy."

Donations of time

Not all donations have to be financial and there are many ways people can help our organisation in our mission. Solo mum of two and Wintec interior design student Leanne Marie Hilder is a strong advocate and supporter of the work Autism NZ does in her local Hamilton community.

"I hugely respect what they do," says Leanne. "As a single mum, all I really have to donate is time, so every Thursday morning, when the kids are at school, I go in to organise the library and help out where I can around the office."

Leanne first came in contact with Autism NZ through her son, whom Special Education services suspected might be on the spectrum.

"Working though things with him, I used a lot of strategies for children on the spectrum, with some advice from Autism NZ," Leanne tells us. "By going in and helping take care of all the little jobs, I try to make things a bit easier for the staff so they can focus on their other work."

People often underestimate how much of a difference volunteering makes. Even giving just a couple of hours per week goes along way in helping our branches be more efficient, and therefore more effective in helping members.

Thanks to Pub Charities

We have recently received some great news from Pub Charities – they have approved a significant grant to help us with our operational costs. They have been a valued partner for many years and they understood the stresses the organisation faced as a result of increased demand for our services, so they stepped in to help.

The money has been earmarked for helping out with member communication, governance, training and overheads, all things that would have been in a very serious state if it weren't for this support.

It has been a tough couple of years for everyone, with many charitable organisations struggling to stay afloat and carry on with the work that we do.

And to that end, we would really like to thank our generous members and supporters - without your support we would not be able to carry on.

Please visit our website, or get in touch with your local branch to find out the many different ways you can help Autism NZ with our mission. With your help we know we can do the best we possibly can to help those with ASD.



Tips from those in the know...

In the next couple of editions of Thinking Differently, we plan on sharing some of the practical knowledge and insights our staff have gained over the years.

Working closely alongside people with ASD and often having a close personal connection with ASD individuals, Autism NZ staff frequently discover new techniques and best practices to manage behaviour and learning.

The problem with this knowledge is that it's often difficult to share with a large audience. So we thought that this 'Autism Advice Corner' would be a great way to get some of this information to the right people. Here are some of our staff's top tips for managing behaviour:

- Before putting your child to bed, try giving them reminder cues. For example: "Remember in 15 minutes it's bed time", then "There is only 5 minutes before bed" and finally "It's bed time now".
- Knowing what to expect can help prevent meltdowns and oppositional behaviour.
- When your child is in bed discuss the components of the next day with them, remembering to focus calmly on liked activities and the people they will be interacting with.
- Being aware that something is going to be happening reduces the element of surprise for them.
- We all know that talking about people as if they weren't there is not very polite, and this is especially true of people with ASD. Just because you think they can't hear or aren't paying attention doesn't mean they aren't picking up on things, and talking about them can make them feel even more separate than they already do.

- If someone is having a conversation it is important to remember not to interject or answer questions for them.
- Continually carrying the conversation for people may give them the impression that you will always speak for them and it could harm their social development.
- When it comes to a routine like washing, visual stimulants are always helpful.
- Laminate the wash routine and stick it to the wall so they can see when, where and how things are going to progress. Having toys in the bath is always a fun idea too.
- Often the messiest time during bathing is when it comes time to wash their hair. To make it go a bit smoother you might like to try using a timer or counting down how long the washing is going to last.

Knowing how much longer the washing is going to last might make the experience more bearable.

If you have any practical advice you would like to share with other parents or caregivers of ASD children or adults we would love to hear it. Please email info@autismnz.org.nz or send us a letter to our postal address on the back of this newsletter.



'Young, Autistic and Stagestruck'

Autism is a cause that we are seeing portrayed on our television screens more often, but the sheer range and breadth of the ASD spectrum makes it a difficult thing to capture and accurately portray on a show.

Airing at 9pm, 2 April on the Living Channel, the UK reality series 'Young, Autistic and Stagestruck' manages to capture the differences found in autistic youth, while also displaying just how much those on the spectrum are capable of achieving.

In what may sound like an odd premise, nine autistic youths' struggles with their behaviours, and each other, to put on a variety show develop into a compassionate portrayal of some of the realities of living on the spectrum.

All the drama of a reality show remains, with Andrew, 17, getting his first crush on fellow

cast member Clair, 19; and high functioning and incredibly intelligent 12-year-old Ben acts up after one of his triggers sets him off.

The show steers clear of cheap shots, however, and many moments make you unsure if you want to laugh or cry. The vast differences between the members of the group serve to remind us that autism truly is a 'spectrum'. Individuals vary greatly in their talents and behaviours, and each struggles with their own challenges.

'Young, Autistic and Stagestruck' is a very good testament to an often-misunderstood issue. By sensitively dispelling any easy black-and-white understanding of autism, and presenting its subjects as very much human beings, the show displays the realities of living with autism.

Branch/Regional updates

TAUPO UPDATE

Collaboration between the Taupo Autistic Spectrum Disorder Support group and Autism NZ has resulted in a new Field Worker on the ground for the Taupo community. We are very happy to welcome Jo Moffat on board in Taupo, and know that with her help the community there will start to get the support they need.

"I'm really passionate about this position," says Jo. "There has been very little help for families here and I am really looking forward to getting set up and helping the people who need it."

Training as a teacher, Jo has completed several papers in special education and behaviour management, providing her with valuable skills and knowledge that will be an asset in her new position.

"My education has helped me in dealing with my nine-year-old son, who has Asperger's and ADHD, and I'm sure it will be of great use as a Field Worker," explains Jo. "My current focus for Taupo is raising awareness of both autism and myself."

Jo is planning a community meeting event for 1 March, to raise awareness among the community that she is now available to support them.

"The meeting will hopefully be featured in the local paper, and attended by prominent community members. It's all about letting people know that I am here for them to turn to for support and information if they need it."

WAIRARAPA UPDATE

Individuals grouping together in a community and taking the initiative to form an organisation to help one another out is something Autism New Zealand is extremely proud of. In fact, it's how we started, which is part of the reason we are very proud to support the new Wairarapa-based support group, Autism 4 Life.

Run out of premises in Carterton, the group is the brainchild of Wendy Moore and Wendy Roesler-Ward.

"Wendy and I both have sons on the spectrum," explains Wendy (Moore). "There used to be a support group in the area but it had faded out over time, so we decided to band together and resurrect it."

They have been liaising with local community groups in hopes of building up an information database about what support services are in their area for people to use.

"When I first moved into the area two years ago, it was hard not knowing what services were in the area. By building this database we hope to make it easier for other families," says Wendy.

The group also gathers regularly night group sessions in Carterton, and organise guest speakers to come in to talk to the group.

Wendy puts it best, saying: "It's all about providing that support structure so people don't feel so isolated".

Our branches have a lot more information to share than we are able to include in this newsletter, so please visit www.autismnz.org.nz to find out what is happening in your region.

NEW BRANCH STAFF



Kerry Treanor, Waikato Administration Officer

Waikato branch kick-started the New Year by welcoming their new Administration Officer, Kerry Treanor, into the fold. Coming from a background in administration, most recently as a night supervisor at Fonterra, Kerry knows how to keep things on track and running smoothly.

"My role includes a lot of things – working on the holiday programme, assisting with fundraising, writing letters, helping new members. I pretty much do a little bit of everything – even tidying up the library!" says Kerry.

Married with two children, Kerry first came to Autism NZ after her son Liam was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome. "I originally came for some information and support, then decided to join the committee," explains Kerry. "13 months later, I got offered this job and jumped at the chance."

"This is my first time working for a non-profit organisation and, so far, I love it. Everything is done for the benefit of our members and I know if I can help one family in their journey with ASD, then I've done my job."

After work finishes, Kerry likes to spend time with her family and friends and if the right song comes on, you'd better watch out, because Kerry likes to get her karaoke on!

Karen Lonergan, Auckland Branch Manager

With 18 years' experience in management positions in the disabilities sector, Karen Lonergan brings a wealth of knowledge to her new role as Auckland Branch Manager. Joining us in mid-December, Karen has faced a huge learning curve in gaining in-depth knowledge about ASD.

"I've really enjoyed the challenge," says Karen. "My management background has helped, but learning a lot of the ASD-specific knowledge has been difficult but enlightening."

Working from the strategic level, Karen's job is to manage the operations of Auckland branch's staff, keep an eye on the finances and ensure the expectations of Auckland's 1500-strong membership are being met.

"I also do a lot of networking and relationship building, funding and grant applications. Recently we reviewed everything, making sure the programmes we run are effective and are what our members want," says Karen.

Karen plans to focus on developing Autism NZ's relationships with the Maori and Pacific Island community in future. "Being Māori and Cook Island myself I am very keen to see more of those families coming in and using our services, while also feeling comfortable from a cultural perspective," explains Karen.

Outside of work Karen spends her time with her children and her local netball club. "I coach both a senior and under 20's netball team, in addition to training six days a week with the team I play for. You could say that, after family, sport and fitness are my passions."

WORLD AUTISM AWARENESS DAY

Saturday 2 April is World Autism Awareness Day. If you would like to know about events happening in your area, contact your local branch.

STAFF PROFILES

Robyn Young – Canterbury/ West Coast and Marlborough



Starting at Autism NZ almost three years ago now, Robyn Young is one of our Service and Support Coordinators. She is the first point of call for members

in the Canterbury/West Coast, Nelson and Marlborough branches.

"I provide support for those living and working with ASD, their families and communities. This includes offering advice, visiting families, meeting with service agencies and attending interagency meetings," says Robyn. "I also offer education and training to families and professionals living and working with people on the autism spectrum and to community groups wanting to learn more about ASD."

With a background in teaching and education, Robyn has always had a focus on helping young people who have challenges, a focus she enjoys continuing in her work with Autism NZ.

"I love working collaboratively with families, schools and other support agencies to get the

best outcomes for those with ASD," explains Robyn. "It's rewarding to see the awareness and knowledge of autism and various management strategies steadily increasing."

Outside of her work with Autism NZ, Robyn continues to work with young people, offering her time as a trainer for Gymsports NZ and Playgym.

"I love to inspire an understanding of physical movement and help little people become physically competent with their bodies and enjoy being physically active," says Robyn.

With the little spare time Robyn has, she likes to maintain her semi-rural property in North Canterbury and go tramping in the local area.

"I also love catching up with my children – my son, a white water kayak instructor living in Canada, and my daughter, who is studying Physical Education at Otago."

Natasha Delgarno – Auckland



When Natasha Delgarno found out four years ago that her partner was on the spectrum, she went in search of support.

"I contacted Autism NZ Auckland branch

and attended the Partner Support Group meetings," says Natasha. "Later when a job

became available my name was put forward, and I started working for Autism NZ."

That was three and a half years ago now, and in that time Natasha has really grown in her role as our Auckland Adult and Youth Liaison Officer. Handling enquiries, overseeing the Adult and Youth Social Groups and the new Women with Asperger's Group, and dealing with any other matters that come her way, Natasha remains dedicated to her work.

"I love my job and can't imagine life without the wonderful ASD adults I work with. I am constantly humbled by them and find being able to support people in often isolating situations very rewarding," says Natasha.

What makes Natasha particularly good at dealing with parents is her ability to draw on personal experience. "Aside from my partner being Aspie, my teenage son has Tourette's Syndrome and ADHD. This background makes it easy for me to empathise with the parents and other people I work with," she says.

Outside of her role at Autism NZ, and in line with her caring personality, Natasha admits to being a bit of a hippy.

"I love nature, healthy living, natural therapies and going for walks. Spending time with my partner and three children is also something I cherish."



HEARTS & MINDS

When the team from Tony Attwood's Brisbane-based Minds & Hearts clinic presented at our annual conference last September everyone was blown away by their expertise, skill and knowledge about ASD.

We are delighted to announce that at the end of March, two of the Minds & Hearts psychologists are returning to New Zealand for a nationwide seminar tour.

Conceived in 2005 to meet the growing need for ASD specialist services, Minds & Hearts has grown into a team of nine expert psychologists, chaired by the renowned Professor Tony Attwood.

Offering workshops, diagnostic assessments, group and individual therapy sessions, their specialist service is sensitive to the unique needs of those with ASD.

During their tour, Dr Louise Ford, DPsych (Clin) MAPS MCCP, and Winnie Yu Pow Lau, MPsych (ED) PGradDip (CH&FamPsych) MAPS, will present seminars focusing on two crucial issues facing those on the spectrum: transitioning and relationships.

Aimed at encompassing the varied stages and ages of those with ASD, the presentation will be split into two hour-long segments:

1. **Transitioning:** At various stages in our lives we all find making changes difficult, like changing to new schools, colleges, university and workplaces. How can we support individuals on the spectrum who do not like a change in routine to accept and even welcome these major life changes? The changes are unavoidable as we progress, but do they have to be traumatic?
2. **Relationships:** It is important to ensure that people on the spectrum are well equipped to be making the right relationship choices – i.e. friends, family, colleagues and life partners.

How do we deal with these relationships not going according to plan? What about bullying issues?

This potential minefield needs to be negotiated in order to achieve a rewarding result and this seminar will help to answer some of these questions.

At the end of the presentation there will be plenty of time for questions or queries you may have for either expert.

The seminars will be held from 9am to 1pm at the following locations and dates:

- Wellington – 30 March
- New Plymouth – 31 March
- Auckland – 1 April
- Christchurch – 2 April.

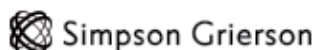
In Christchurch, to celebrate World Autism Awareness Day, Autism NZ is delighted to announce that we are presenting by video conference Donna Williams, best-selling author, artist, singer-songwriter, screenwriter and sculptor. Donna was diagnosed with autism after being assessed as a psychotic infant in 1965 at age two, tested multiple times for deafness and labelled disturbed throughout her childhood. Donna is an inspiration to many and will be speaking on her own experiences of transitions and relationships.

For more information and to register for a seminar go to www.autismnz.org.nz/Registrations/Seminar-Registration.php or call Pat Gluck on 04 470 7616, Pat.Gluck@autismnz.org.nz.

Our Supporters

We are forever grateful to our supporters and funders, whose contributions go a long way towards making a difference to our members.

We'd like to say a special thanks to **Pub Charity**, the **Lottery Grants Board** and **Lion Foundation** for your funding support; and to **Y&R**, **Footprint Books**, **Simpson Grierson**, **Springfree Trampolines**, **MedicAlert** and **Haven Licensing** for your ongoing assistance.



Sling Shot is 'Raising the Flag' for autism

Raising the Flag empowers Slingshot customers to choose to have a portion of their monthly bill donated to an Autism NZ Branch. Then each month, Slingshot will send us a cheque to help those affected by an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

To join Slingshot for internet and tolls, visit www.slingshot.co.nz/autismnz or phone **0800 89 2000**.

If you are already a Slingshot customer, simply let them know you want to be part of this programme and they'll link your account.



Shine a light for autism

The Autism Candle is a coconut and lime scented candle and was created by Candles of New Zealand. It comes in a specially-designed tin which is easy to post and makes a great gift.

Available from the Flicker Candle Emporium store in Tauranga or through their online store, www.flickercandles.co.nz/product_promotion at a cost of \$18.00 per candle. A minimum of \$8 for each candle sold will automatically be donated to Autism NZ.



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Our Branch information

Our branches have a lot more information to share than we are able to include in this newsletter, so please visit www.autismnz.org.nz to find out what is happening in your region.

Branch	Address
National Office 04 470 7616 info@autismnz.org.nz	PO Box 12599 Thorndon, Wellington Ground Floor, Molesworth House, 101 Molesworth Street, Wellington
Auckland 09 846 0913 auckland@autismnz.org.nz	PO Box 41420 65 Morningside Drive St Lukes Auckland 1025
Bay of Plenty 07 571 0003 0800 571 000 bayofplenty@autismnz.org.nz	PO Box 841 Tauranga 3140 Compass Community Village, 17th Avenue, Tauranga 3112
Canterbury/West Coast 03 343 2225 canterbury@autismnz.org.nz	PO Box 42014, Christchurch 8149 Level 1, Trevinos Building, 22 Riccarton Road, Riccarton, Christchurch 8011
Gisborne 06 868 8826 06 863 3380 gisborne@autismnz.org.nz	38 Childers Road, Gisborne Or C/O The Poverty Club, Cnr Childers Rd & Customhouse St, Gisborne
Hawkes Bay	Serviced by National Office
Manawatu (06) 357 7846 manuwatu@autismnz.org.nz	PO Box 4624, Palmerston North 4422
Northland	Serviced by National Office
Nelson / Marlborough 03 539 0285 nelson-marlborough@autismnz.org.nz	PO Box 18, Upper Moutere 7144 197 Martin Road, Upper Moutere Nelson
Otago 03 474 9640 otago@autismnz.org.nz	PO Box 13102, Green Island Dunedin 9052 514 Great King Street, Dunedin 9016
Southland 027 221 6151 southland@autismnz.org.nz	C/O 79 Egerton Road, RD1, Winton 9781
Taranaki 06 769 5958 taranaki@autismnz.org.nz	PO Box 3355, Fitzroy, New Plymouth 4341 Communication House, 62 Powderham Street, New Plymouth 4310
Waikato 07 848 2057 waikato@autismnz.org.nz	PO Box 406 Waikato Mail Centre, Hamilton 3240 63 Kent Street Frankton Hamilton 3204
Wanganui 06 343 2082 wanganui@autismnz.org.nz	C/O 180 Upper Roberts Avenue, RD14, Wanganui 4584
Wellington 04 472 1007 Ext 810 wellington@autismnz.org.nz	PO Box 12599, Thorndon, Wellington Ground Floor, Molesworth House, 101 Molesworth Street, Wellington