



Press Release SL08/05/04

For Immediate Release

7th May 2004

THE NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY AUTISM AWARENESS WEEK 2004

The National Autistic Society's Autism Awareness Week is during the week of 17th – 24th May. The South Lanarkshire branch (SLNAS) will be marking Autism Awareness Week this year by holding a stall at Centre West Shopping Centre in East Kilbride on Sat 15th May. We will have a range of information available as well as committee members available to talk to anyone interested in autism and Asperger syndrome.

The group will also be holding a coffee morning and jumble sale at Claremont Parish Church, High Common Road, St Leonards, East Kilbride on Saturday 22nd May 2004, starting at 10am.

In Hamilton, the Body Shop in Regents Centre will be selling raffle tickets throughout May in aid of SLNAS activities. We'd like to thank the manager and staff for their support.

Autism (including Asperger syndrome) is a lifelong developmental disability, characterised by a triad of impairments that involve difficulties forming social relationships, problems with verbal and non-verbal communication and a lack of imagination. It is a spectrum disorder occurring in varying degrees of severity and affects more than an estimated 500,000 people in the UK.

Around an estimated 3,000 people of all ages in South Lanarkshire are affected. SLNAS has over 150 members throughout Rutherglen, Cambuslang, Hamilton, Strathaven and East Kilbride. We aim to provide support to the whole family, through providing opportunities for social contact both for parents, carers and affected individuals alike. We also have a good proportion of professional members who work with people with autism and Asperger syndrome.

Parents, grandparents and carers of a child or an adult with an autistic spectrum disorder are welcome to come to our meetings, as are professionals who work with people with autism. Our next meeting is planned to be very informal, allowing parents and professionals to share experiences with one another. Light refreshments and nibbles will be available. The meeting is to be held on Wednesday 12th May in the County Court Suite, Civic Centre, East Kilbride. Further information can be accessed on our website www.slnas.org.uk or by calling Linda Johnson on 07866 530955.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS:

Autism Awareness Week 2004

Autism Awareness Week 2004 will be held from 17-24th May. The focus will be on 'planning for life'. Autism is a lifelong developmental disability and we'll be looking at the position of ageing individuals with autism and their families and highlighting the issues faced during the many transition stages in life. The NAS will be holding a number exciting events around the UK during AAW 2004 including a conference, parliamentary reception, corporate fundraising challenge.

For more information, please contact the **NAS PR & Media Team** on **020 7903 3593** or email press@nas.org.uk

About autism & Asperger syndrome

People who have autism or Asperger syndrome are said to have a 'triad' of impairments. Both conditions are commonly referred to as autistic spectrum disorders or ASD. This is because all people with the condition tend to be affected in different ways and to differing degrees of severity. It is a lifelong developmental disability, affecting around 500,000 people in the UK.

People with an ASD find **communication** difficult and often fail to understand the subtleties of language that the rest of us take for granted. Some never acquire speech. Body language and facial expressions are a mystery.

Perhaps because of this, people with ASD do not seek to **interact socially** with others and are often seen as 'loners' and have difficulty in making and keeping friends. Thirdly, people with ASD can have problems with **imagination**. This leads them to seek repetitive activities and predictable routines. This makes them seem very rigid in their everyday lives, as change is very difficult for them to deal with. Challenging behaviour can also be an issue as affected people are frustrated by their lack of understanding and lack of ability to make themselves understood.

Autism is often referred to as an 'invisible' condition. Because there are no physical traits, people with ASD can appear to others to be aloof, arrogant, rude, anti-social and badly or oddly behaved. People with ASD are unaware that their behaviour comes across in this way and often do not understand that others have thoughts and feelings too.

How We Help

South Lanarkshire NAS group aims to help through regular monthly meetings. These are held on the second Wednesday of the month in the District Court Suite, Civic Centre, East Kilbride. Our next meetings are on the 12th of May and the 9th of June.

We also wish to provide opportunities for social contact for the children and to allow them to share experiences with the whole family. This can be very stressful for parents and siblings, particularly in situations where the general public do not understand why a seemingly normal child is behaving in an inappropriate manner. Therefore we provided a visit to a pantomime before Christmas 2003. The entire audience was made up of our group which meant that parents could relax, knowing that they were in company that understood any behavioural issues, while the children got to enjoy a night out at the theatre.

A fundraising "Mock Auction" held in February raised over £2000. These funds will be used to provide a summer trip for our member's families.

About SLNAS

The South Lanarkshire NAS branch has over 150 members throughout Rutherglen, Cambuslang, Hamilton and East Kilbride. We can be contacted through Ross Macfadyen, Communications Officer, 07941 252 485, email: mail@slnas.org.uk

South Lanarkshire NAS holds monthly meetings on the second Wednesday of the month in the County Court Rooms, Civic Centre, Andrew Street, East Kilbride. We aim to support families and carers of those with Autism and Asperger syndrome through these meetings, telephone and email support, and our web site, www.slnas.org.uk.

The National Autistic Society

The National Autistic Society (NAS) is the UK's leading charity for people with autistic spectrum disorders and their families. Spearheading national and international initiatives and providing a strong voice for autism, the Society provides a wide range of services to help people with autism and Asperger syndrome live their lives with as much independence as possible.

The NAS Autism Helpline is supported by Barclays: 0845 070 4004. Opening Hours 10am-4pm, Monday to Friday..