



**Press Release SL13/10/04**

**For Immediate Release**

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## **SOUTH LANARKSHIRE NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY SUPPORT GPs WORKING WITH AUTISM**

South Lanarkshire National Autistic Society (SLNAS), the local branch of the NAS, are presenting an information resource pack to health professionals within the region in order to assist them in treating and identifying patients with an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD). The project has been funded by local fundraising initiatives, and seeks to raise awareness of ASD in front line medical services.

The pack will be made available to nearly 80 GP surgeries in Cambuslang, East Kilbride, Hamilton and Rutherglen, and Accident and Emergency units at Hairmyres, Monklands and Wishaw General.

The pack includes a new book, *Health Care and the Autism Spectrum* by Alison Cooper-Morton, which is aimed at assisting health professionals in dealing with patients on the autistic spectrum. For example, physical examinations may be problematic as people with autism may be hyper sensitive to touch and noise, while many are not able to fully express and describe their symptoms, making any diagnosis difficult.

"Often visits to the doctor can be traumatic for people with autism," said Ross Macfadyen, Branch Officer for SLNAS. "We hope that by providing doctors with this valuable book that we can help in making surgery visits less stressful, particularly in incidents that require A&E care."

"GPs tend to be the key for our members," Ross informs us. "GPs can then provide a route to diagnosis and this leads to specialist services offered by education and social work departments." However, in research conducted by the NAS, GPs said that the numbers of patients with autism and Asperger syndrome on their lists were increasing, but that they felt they lacked the skills and expertise to pick up the possible indicators that a patient may have an ASD. "By raising awareness among doctors, we hope that less people will fall through net and get the support they need."

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 to be held on Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> November in the County Court Suite, Civic Centre, East Kilbride. Our guest speaker will be Jennifer Kirk and Robert Moffat of The National Autistic Society. They will be talking of a new project to collate local services information into a pack for parents and individuals with autism and Asperger syndrome.

Further information can be accessed on our website [www.slnas.org.uk](http://www.slnas.org.uk) or by calling Ross Macfadyen on 07941 252485.

**ENDS**

# NOTES TO EDITORS:

## 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.

## 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, Branch Officer, 07941 252 485, email: [mail@slnas.org.uk](mailto: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](http://www.slnas.org.uk).

## 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 meeting is on the 10<sup>th</sup> November.

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 were used to provide a summer trip to East Links Family Park in Dunbar for our member's families.

## About The National Autistic Society

The National Autistic Society is the UK's leading charity for people with autistic spectrum disorders and their families. Founded in 1962, it continues to spearhead national and international initiatives and provide a strong voice for all people with autism. The NAS 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 relies on the support of its members and donors to continue its vital work for people with autism. To become a member, make a donation or to find out more about the work of the NAS, visit the NAS website [www.autism.org.uk](http://www.autism.org.uk) or call the NAS donation line 08702 33 40 40 (national rates apply).

In March 2004 Vodafone UK entered into a three-year "cause partnership" with The National Autistic Society. The mobile phone company hopes to raise up to £6 million for the charity during this period. Vodafone's support will enable the NAS to expand the reach of existing programmes, which raise awareness of autism and support people with autism and their carers.

For more information about autism and for help in your area, call the NAS Autism Helpline supported by Barclays: 0845 070 4004 10am-4pm, Monday to Friday, (local rates apply).

For more information on the NAS please contact the **NAS PR & Media Team** on **020 7903 3593** or email [press@nas.org.uk](mailto:press@nas.org.uk)