



Press Release SL16/02/05

For Immediate Release

17th February 2005

AUTISM EVENT A GREAT SUCCESS

The South Lanarkshire National Autistic Society (SLNAS) held a special autism awareness event on Tuesday 15th February in the Corporate Banqueting Suite, County Buildings, Almada Street, Hamilton. Guest speakers were Dr Gordon Bell, of charity Action Against Autism, and Dr Robert Moffat, of The National Autistic Society. Audience members came from as far away as Ayrshire to hear the speakers.

At the event, SLNAS Branch Officer Ross Macfadyen highlighted recent figures for autism diagnosis published by the Scottish Executive. The report [*Audit of Services for People with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Statistical Report (2004)*] states that there are 561 children and 37 adults in Lanarkshire with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Ross said, "These figures are somewhat short of the real picture. The National Autistic Society statistics suggest that 1,240 children and 4,430 adults in Lanarkshire could be affected by autism and Asperger syndrome."

Further, Gordon Bell showed the audience graphs showing a rising incidence of ASD diagnosis since the early 1990's as part of his talk on Essential Fatty Acids and heavy metals in relation to autism. Ross said, "The figures show that autism is not a rare condition, and neither is ASD just a childhood condition. Our autistic children are becoming autistic adults. It is therefore important that services are in place for all age groups."

Dr Robert Moffat, who is National Officer for the NAS in Scotland, told the group of two centres funded by the Scottish Executive in Lothian and Glasgow. The adult centre in Maryhill, Glasgow has been set up as a "one stop shop" for adults to gain information, diagnosis and support. The centre is designed as a drop in centre for people with autism, their carers and professionals.

SLNAS supports members in Blantyre, Cambuslang, Halfway, Hamilton, East Kilbride and Rutherglen. Our meetings are held on the second Wednesday of the month in the County Court Suite, Civic Centre, East Kilbride. Parents, grandparents and carers of a child or an adult with an autistic spectrum disorder are all welcome to come to our meetings, as are professionals who work with people with autism.

Further information can be accessed on our website www.slnas.org.uk or by calling Ross Macfadyen on 07941 252485.

The attached picture shows (from left): Dr Robert Moffat (National officer – NAS); Dr Gordon Bell (Action Against Autism) and Ross Macfadyen (Branch Officer – SLNAS)

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

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.

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 9th February 2005.

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 2004. 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 2004 raised over £2000. These funds were used to provide a summer trip to East Links Family Park in Dunbar for our member's families.

In October 2004, we provided 80 GPs throughout South Lanarkshire with a pack containing information on autism and Asperger syndrome. The aim of the pack being to raise awareness of ASD in front line medical professional and to assist our doctors in treating and identifying patients with an ASD.

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 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