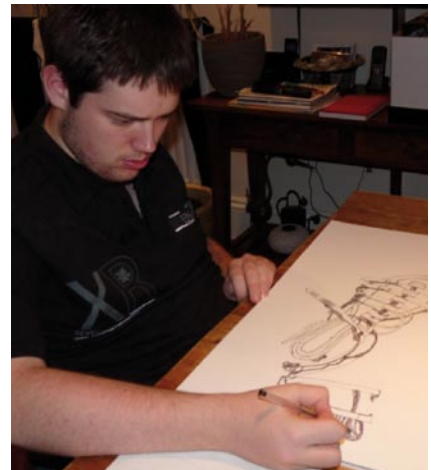


A4H News...

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Exhibition for budding artist

Talented artist Jack Geraghty is busy preparing for his very own art exhibition to be held in Hertfordshire in March.

Jack, 17, who has already won an international art competition, will be showing off his artwork at the Halls Green Studio Gallery, at Fairclough Hall in Weston.

Working mainly with biro and charcoal, Jack, who lives in Stevenage, has been selling his pictures since the age of 12, and tries to produce at least one new piece every week.

His mum Maria Wheeler says: "Jack sees things very differently to you and I and has a unique way of drawing. When it comes to his artwork he has a lot of patience and concentration which he doesn't normally have. He is very talented."

Jack, who attends night classes at Letchworth Art Centre twice a week and says Picasso is his favourite artist, adds: "Drawing

makes me feel happy and I think I am quite rare. Everyone always seems to be amazed by what I do."

Last year he won a first prize when he entered a competition run by The Hoffmann Foundation.

His teacher at Letchworth Art Centre Nigel Markham, a former Royal Academy student, agrees that Jack is quite unique.

He says: "Jack just draws instinctively and has unique vision as well as great concentration. He sees things differently to other people and has an interesting view of the world. I think he could go far."

Maria is currently trying to

find a full-time art course in the area for Jack, but it is proving difficult because of his lack of formal qualifications.

However she is determined not to be beaten, saying: "I already have an application form for the Royal Academy, even though students tend to have got a degree first!"

Jack's exhibition will be held at the **Halls Green Studio Gallery, Fairclough Hall, Halls Green, Weston, 3rd - 31st March.**

Preview

Saturday 3rd March 1pm - 5pm

Daily thereafter

Monday - Friday 11am - 4pm

Saturdays and Sundays by appointment only 11am - 3pm

For further information or to make an appointment contact gallery proprietor **Val Cansick** on **07814 019339** or by email at art-valcansick@hotmail.co.uk

Do you have a talent which you would be happy to tell us about and which could encourage and inspire others? Please let us know at [Aspergers 4 Herts.](http://Aspergers4Herts.org)





Paws for thought

A pioneering charity is calling for parents to help with new research to examine the impact pet dogs have on families where there is a child with ASD.

The project is part of Dogs for the Disabled's PAWS project (Parents Autism Workshops and Support), and is being carried out with the National Autistic Society and Lincoln University thanks to funding by the Big Lottery.

The aim of the research is to investigate exactly what it is about dogs and their behaviour that can help improve the social and emotional development of children with ASD, and the charity is looking for both families who have dogs already and families who are thinking of getting a dog within the next 12 months.

Corri Waitt, PAWS Research Coordinator at Dogs for the Disabled, explains: "It's very exciting to be involved in a great project that could benefit so many families today and in

the future that have children with an ASD. If you are a parent of a child with autism you will understand the challenges and frustrations caused as a result of their condition. At Dogs for the Disabled we believe that pet dogs can help your whole family overcome these challenges and enhance everyday life."

Children should be between three and sixteen with a clinical diagnosis of ASD. The research would involve three telephone interviews over a period of six to 12 months and/or a home visit to observe interactions between the child and dog. For more information visit the charity website <http://paws.dogsforthedisabled.org>, contact them at the following e-mail address paws@dogsforthedisabled.org or phone 01295 759836.

paws | parents autism workshops & support

Dogs for the Disabled is also offering workshops to provide parents with information and long-term support for sourcing, choosing, handling and training a pet dog to benefit their child with autism and the family as a whole. Through the workshop programme, parents attend a series of three one-day workshops. These include practical demonstrations, discussions, hands-on learning and course handouts, covering a variety of topics, from ways that dogs can help the child's development, to selecting the right dog for your family. Workshops are taking place across the country, and for more information contact 01295 759836. The cost for all three workshops is £30.

New face at Aspergers 4 Herts



Hi there. My name is Rachael Newman-Sanders and I have recently taken on the job of writing your newsletter, as well as doing general publicity work for Aspergers 4 Herts. Before I had my four children I was a news reporter on local newspapers and I also spent a couple of years at a London public relations agency, dealing with national and local media. Since then I have been a freelance writer for businesses and charities and I am really looking forward to this new challenge.

I have already met a few of your members, including Jack Geraghty – who as you will see from the photographs in the newsletter has an amazing talent for drawing. He is preparing for an exhibition of his artwork in Weston next month, and it would be great if some of you were able to go along and enjoy his pictures and give him some extra support.

I am hoping to meet many more of you in the future, and it would be lovely to hear what sort of things you are interested and involved in. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have anything you would like to share with other members, however big or small.

info@aspergers4herts.org



Robot reaches out to autistic children

Children with Asperger syndrome could soon benefit from a remarkable robot which has already transformed the behaviour of many autistic children.

The robot, called KASPAR, is covered with silicone to give a feel of human skin and can laugh, frown, blink, smile and wave its arms. Through play with KASPAR, children are able to learn more about human emotions and social interaction.

Now the researchers at the University of Hertfordshire who

designed KASPAR are hoping to build more than 30 more KASPAR robots.

They are also running a fundraising campaign to enable them to look at the effects of the robot on different groups of children, with the hope that this might include those with Asperger syndrome.

Professor Kerstin Dautenhahn, of the University of Hertfordshire, who first designed KASPAR with her team in 2005, says: "At present KASPAR'S focus is on children at

the lower functioning end of the autistic spectrum but I personally hope we can include children with Asperger syndrome in our planned long-term study. This depends on factors such as tailoring the robot to offer games that are interesting to children with AS."

She added that parents and teachers have been amazed by the transformation which KASPAR has made in children's behaviour so far.

She says: "Some are seeing the children make eye contact, seek to share experiences or mimic actions for the first time when playing with KASPAR.

These small steps are big breakthroughs for the children, and their families and teachers."

Fun at the flicks!

A NEW initiative which makes going to the cinema at Hatfield more enjoyable for adults and children on the autism spectrum has been hailed a great success.

Around 200 people have already taken advantage of the Autism Friendly Screenings at Hatfield ODEON, a project launched by the cinema chain alongside autism and learning disability provider Dimensions.

Films shown so far are Mr Popper's Penguins, Johnny English Reborn, Arthur Christmas, Happy Feet 2 and Puss in Boots and the scheme has been so successful that it is hoped there will be a film once a month from now on.

At the Autism Friendly Screenings:

- Lights are left on low and the volume is turned down
- There are no trailers before the film
- Cinema-goers can move

around and make noise as they feel comfortable

- People can bring their own food and drink
- Support workers and carers can attend for free with a CEA card

Steve Humphreys, general manager of ODEON Hatfield, says: "The feedback has been very positive and the guests who have attended have been very complimentary. The auditorium where the film is being shown is near the toilets and near an area where carers can take any autistic persons to relax in case they

become anxious or over excited."

Cinema tickets can be purchased as normal from the cinema box office or online via the ODEON website www.odeon.co.uk or through the accessibility helpline on 0800 138 3315 between 11am and 8pm.

Aspergers 4 Herts will send members an e-mail whenever we hear of an Autism Friendly Screening at ODEON Hatfield.

If you have been to an Autism Friendly Screening we would love to hear what your thoughts here info@aspergers4herts.org



Link between zinc and autism

Children deficient in zinc may be at a higher risk of autism, according to a recently published study.

But parents have been urged not to rush out and buy zinc supplements for their offspring – as experts say much more research is needed in the field.

The study found that large numbers of children with autism and related conditions – such as Asperger syndrome – were deficient in the mineral, which is found in meat, bread and dairy products.

Researchers in Toyko measured the levels of zinc in the hair of nearly 2,000 children aged zero to 15 years, who had been diagnosed with autism and related conditions.

The researchers found a ‘significant association’ with zinc deficiency, according to the journal *Scientific Reports*.

Overall, almost one third of

the children were deficient in zinc. The lowest levels were seen amongst the youngest children, with almost half of the boys and more than half of the girls aged up to the age of three judged to be deficient.

The research concluded that some of the autistic

It is just as bad to have too much zinc as too little

children may possibly benefit from a “nutritional approach supplementing deficient nutrients such as zinc...”

However British experts warn that much more research

is needed and stress that linking something with a condition does not necessarily mean it caused it.

Speaking in the Mail Online Professor Dorothy Bishop, of the University of Oxford, said: “If zinc deficiency is confirmed in future research, then it remains unclear whether this is a cause of autism, or rather reflective of dietary abnormalities.”

Also speaking in the Mail Online Uta Frith, of University College, London, warned that people should not start medicating themselves or their children with zinc.

She said: “It is just as bad to have too much zinc as too little. If you take supplements, you could well err on the side of poisoning.”

Find out more by following these links for the Daily Mail and scientific reports

<http://www.nature.com/srep/2011/111103/srep00129/full/srep00129.html>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-2057388/Low-levels-zinc-linked-autism-children.html>

Volunteers needed for new research

Researchers at the Cognition and Brain Sciences Unit and the Autism Research Centre in Cambridge are looking for volunteers for a new study into object vision in autism.

The study will be using MRI brain-scanning to investigate brain activity patterns in object vision. These activity patterns will allow for a comparison of mental representations of objects in typically developing adults

and people with a diagnosis of Asperger syndrome or High-functioning autism.

Volunteers will be invited to come to the MRC Cognition & Brain Sciences Unit in Cambridge on two separate days to perform simple visual judgment tasks while pictures are taken of their brain. In addition, some standardized tests will be administered.

Volunteers will be fully

reimbursed for their time, up to £75 upon finishing the two experimental sessions. Additionally, travel expenses and travelling time will be reimbursed.

The study requires right-handed male participants aged 18-35 years with a diagnosis of high-functioning autism or Asperger syndrome. We need to be able to contact a parent to perform a phone interview about the volunteer’s early development.

For more details contact researcher Dr Ian Charest, email ian.charest@mrc-cbu.cam.ac.uk Telephone 01223 273726. The project ends in June 2012.



Fundraising news



Three cheers for knitting nanna

Champion knitter Teresa Roffey has raised another £1,000 for Aspergers 4 Herts, taking her grand total donated to the charity to nearly £3,000.

Granny Teresa, 77, raised the money by selling her beautifully knitted garments and Christmas decorations at craft fairs, as well as to friends and family.

Meanwhile parishioners and

school parents in Welwyn Garden City have helped her daughter, Suzanne Meenan, to raise another £500 for the charity.

Parishioners at Holy Family Church in the town have been busy baking cakes and selling them after church every Sunday, raising more than £400 for Aspergers 4 Herts. And a craft stall held at Holy Family School brought in more than £100.

Secretary and Trustee of Aspergers 4 Herts Suzanne Meenan says: "I have been overwhelmed by the generosity of all the people who have baked cakes and served coffee in order to raise funds for our charity.

"This is also a great way of raising awareness of Asperger syndrome and telling people about our work."