

# ASPIA NEWSLETTER - September 2016

## Next ASPIA partner support group meeting:

Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> September

**AT: THE RUGBY BAR, CLUB BURWOOD, 97 Burwood Road, Burwood (Sydney)**

This is NOT the RSL Club in Shaftesbury Road, although it is in their group of clubs.

Club Burwood is a smaller club, and is on the corner of George Street, just a short walk down the hill from the railway station. **The Rugby Bar is downstairs.**

**Time: 1.30pm for 2pm start, concludes 5pm.**

Cost: \$10.00 for non-members, \$5.00 for members (membership is \$55 per year, includes library)

### **PARKING:**

The best option is the **John Street car park behind the Club (Wilson parking). \$4 daily rate for weekends.** Plenty of available spaces. Other options are mostly metered or too far away.

**LUNCH CLUB** is at the Club (from 12noon), and drinks/dinner after the meeting for those who can stay on. There is great benefit in getting to know each other informally over dinner or drinks.

## **What's happening at our SEPTEMBER meeting?**

**“Making Sense of Asperger Syndrome”.** Nola Norris, ASPIA's web developer and regular presenter will bring this presentation again because it is so tremendously informative, and was very well received in our February meeting. With the number of new people who've joined the group since February, we thought it would be very beneficial to provide this education again.

*Nola has enjoyed a diverse career in education, having worked in schools (primary and secondary) in both the public and private sectors, and in universities within NSW, Australia.*

*The diagnosis of Nola's husband with Asperger syndrome (AS) in 2005 led to an interest in the learning environments encountered by gifted students with AS in mainstream schools. In particular, the research fostered her desire to understand the cognitive profile and learning needs of these twice-exceptional learners. Nola completed her PhD thesis, *A new perspective on thinking, memory and learning in gifted adults with Asperger syndrome: Five phenomenological case studies*, in 2014 at the University of Wollongong, NSW. She employed neuroscience and autism research to interpret her findings from her phenomenological research study, which involved gifted adults with Asperger syndrome as participants.*

*Nola's research journey led to the development of a conceptual framework for professional development of pre-service and practising teachers to transform understanding of the unique learning needs and strengths of gifted students who have Asperger syndrome. This framework has also been found to be helpful for parents and life partners of people with autism spectrum disorder.*

*Nola's PhD thesis has been cited in a book that was launched at the University of Wollongong in July 2016: *Teaching university students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder: a guide to developing academic capacity and proficiency*, McMahon-Coleman & Draisma (2016), published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers. (This book was featured in ASPIA's August newsletter.)*

*Nola joined the Faculty of Education at Morling College, Macquarie Park, NSW, as the Deputy Director of Programs in early 2016. She is also currently setting up an educational consultancy - [www.nelt.com.au](http://www.nelt.com.au).*

(Additional Note: Bring something warm to put on during the meeting. The air conditioning in the Rugby Bar can be freezing.)

<b>ASPIA Support Group Meeting Dates for 2016</b>	
3 September	1 October
5 November	3 December

### **Partner support group in Port Macquarie**

Third Thursday of the month, 10am – 12noon, Port Macquarie Town Library.  
Contact Meredith on 0428 904 007 or email [meredithlew@gmail.com](mailto:meredithlew@gmail.com)

### **Reminder about Divorce Partners who provided an informative session in our April meeting.**

Divorce Partners offer low-cost settlement negotiation packages for couples who hope to avoid the horrendous cost and adversarial experience of lawyers and the Family Court Process.

Their business is growing and they have representatives in most major cities now.

Website: [www.divorcepartners.com.au](http://www.divorcepartners.com.au) Facebook: [www.facebook.com/divorcepartners](http://www.facebook.com/divorcepartners)

### **ASPIA's online Yahoo discussion group – now offering a separate forum for men with female partners**

We've been receiving more enquiries from men who need a safe place to talk, so we've established a new ASPIA forum for them. \$25.00 subscription for either forum.

Visit ASPIA's website at [www.aspia.org.au/contactus.html](http://www.aspia.org.au/contactus.html) to request to join – Carol will email you with instructions once she receives notification of your payment.

The forum is a great place to discuss sensitive stuff that can't be published in newsletters, etc, and with an option for men now, more needs can be met more effectively.

### **ASPIA's website contains lots of helpful information sheets, plus information on other support groups, professionals, links, etc: <http://www.aspia.org.au>**

### **Sydney Groups available for adults with AS and also couples**

Clinical Psychologist Jeroen Decates runs groups for adults with AS and also for couples.

Psychologist Eleanor Gittins is running a couples group in Menai.

Please refer to the professionals list on the ASPIA website for their contact details.

### **Research Study by Bronwyn Wilson (continuing for remainder of 2016).**

#### **Good responses coming in - please contribute if at all possible.**

Bronwyn says: **"The purpose of this study is to explore communication patterns and resulting difficulties that can occur in the close relationships of adults with Asperger's Syndrome"**.

Bronwyn previously researched the need for prompting in AS adults, and presented her findings at an ASPIA meeting, which were very interesting and helpful.

If you can help with her next survey, please follow this link:

[https://ecuau.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_6sNVH8I0WgVQsPH](https://ecuau.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_6sNVH8I0WgVQsPH)

(Please click on the final "arrow" in the survey so your answers are recorded).

### **Expressions of Interest, please**

Quite often in our informal conversations many of us talk about the possibility of having a weekend retreat sometime.

If anyone would be interested in this, can arrange to get the weekend away, and can afford it, please let me know by email, so we can consider planning one. Carol.

## Thought

In Nola's presentation (February and September meetings) she shares some really interesting things about memory in ASD.

In some of my ponderings this last month I jotted down in my notebook how we don't develop shared memories with our AS partners. How many times have you been referring back to an incident or experience where both you and your AS partner were present, and shared the experience at the time (or so you thought), but your recollection and his/her recollection are so completely removed from each other, you feel like your partner is lying or making up a story, or wasn't even there. Very disconcerting. This aspect alone leads to much conflict in our relationship situations, because if you don't have a similar memory of the same situation, then how do you build on the experience or use it as a reference point for other points of discussion or decisions? Or even just enjoy the experience of knowing you share a memory that has meaning for you as a couple or family, and that contributes to the relationship or family history in a positive way.

This phenomenon tends to add to the perception that nothing in the relationship is ever resolved, and that we're never on the same page with our partners about anything.

Nola's research into memory actually sheds some light on this, reassuring us that it is a valid phenomenon, and that our AS partners are not actually lying, they are presenting aspects of the situation or experience that they do remember, based on the other strong parts of their memory, which usually relate to concrete facts or actions. They tend then to present the memory according to what information they recognised, or that they value, or that they believe they experienced, from their perspective, and sometimes they then construct the rest of the story around that, but it will be a different version to the memory we have of the event, and the meaning we gave it.

Our NT brains tend to fill in all the connections and create a more complex and complete memory of an experience because we are aware at the time, interacting with others, creating meaning as we go and are then able to put it into words in a way that others can generally relate to. That doesn't mean we don't forget things ourselves sometimes, or have a different perception of something that took place, but the essence of what I'm writing about is a commonly occurring experience in our relationships.

I did know someone on the spectrum once who was actually able to run off a commentary of a situation, as though he'd memorised it as it happened and had a running commentary going in his head, which he then would share when it came up in discussion. What was missing though was the meaning or interpretation of the situation that most ordinary people would take from the situation, and in its place was an analysis or judgment from his own perspective, which omitted the "general" view that others would have had of the same situation. So he could be relied on to remember all the actions and facts that happened, chronologically (and according to the priority he placed on the information), but his interpretation didn't do anyone else justice. But, he felt very confident in his memory of the event, and who can argue with facts?

Carol Grigg OAM, Dip Counselling, Member ACA Level 2

I provide phone and skype counselling for partners who need to talk. Please see my website [www.carolgriggcounselling.com.au](http://www.carolgriggcounselling.com.au)