

As Chair of the Board of Trustees, I would like to welcome all those at **Asperger London Area Group** to this long awaited summer edition of our newsletter. It is hoped that the publication will turn out to be of great use as regards to giving information on meetings and events as well as more personal observations from members and users of our service. Let us look forward to many more editions in the future.

Desmond Meldrum, Chairman

ALAG Support Services update - by Ethney Anderson, ALAG Facilitator

ALAG continues to grow and provide much needed support, advice & information to its members and other professionals. Over the past year we have seen a steady increase in our membership as a result of referrals we receive from several London boroughs. Our input on the Islington and Camden Autism Partnership Boards and our work with Health Watch Islington, Camden & Hackney serves to highlight the needs of our members and promote the work of ALAG. We also sit on the DWP Customer Representative Group in Islington, keeping up to date on issues and changes within Job Centre Plus as well as seeking answers to issues our members are facing. We are thankful to have the support of Elleney and Zainab from IAP (Islington Autism Project) who regularly attend ALAG and meet with me to develop ideas on improving autism services in the borough and planning for the future. Our ALAG meetings cover a range of helpful topics and interestingly the two best attended meetings were Employment and Mental Health, both with prominent visiting speakers. We would like to thank all our speakers for their time and expertise and a special thanks to the members of our planning team. Our exciting social events are highlighted in this issue but we want to encourage all our members to suggest ideas and social events for the group. We are forever grateful to our Islington commissioners for allowing us the use of the Town Hall without which we would not have a place for our meetings. Voluntary Action Islington have also played a positive role in supporting ALAG and we look forward to their continued support.

Autism & Mental Health

At the June ALAG meeting, Consultant Clinical Psychologist, **Dr Jason Crabtree** gave a stimulating and insightful presentation on the relationship between mental health and autism. He revealed that things like depression, OCD and psychosis can be linked to having an autistic spectrum condition (ASC), providing simple explanations as to how each condition can manifest. He offered research and statistics - information highly beneficial to ALAG members. There were practical solutions on how to cope with mental health problems, such as exercise and developing a schedule. The talk was engaging and reassuring, with the Q&A afterwards raising further interesting points and anecdotes. **Joe Marshall**

Meet ALAG member – Raj Singh Tattal



Raj Singh Tattal is a most valued ALAG member and artist. At the June meeting, he displayed a cross section of his hyper-realistic pencil drawings in a sort of pop-up gallery. Raj is a Sikh, and a group of American film students were recording the event as part of a project on Sikhs around the world. He gave a brief talk on his experiences with depression, referencing works like 'Light at the end of the Tunnel', which were on show. His extremely detailed pictures look like photographs. They deal with a range of topics, including animal cruelty and autism. He has done a series called Faces on the Spectrum, featuring portraits of some ALAG members. They capture something of the character of each subject, and serve to show that there is no such thing as an autistic face. Raj's artistic career continues to go from strength to strength, with a multitude of exhibitions featuring his work, as well as television and radio interviews, public appearances and even a trip to California.

by Joe Marshall



Art by Raj

Tavistock Clinic Cake Sale!

For a number of years now ALAG has worked closely with the Tavistock Clinic, helping with research studies, training and conferences. We were delighted to be invited to attend the lovely cake sale event they organised on 30th March to mark **World Autism Awareness Week 2017**. I went along with one of our members, Alain English, who had great fun sampling the cakes as part of a taste competition! Alain said "*The event was a good opportunity to meet and talk with the staff and users of the Tavistock Centre about autism (in between mouthfuls of cake that is)*" The cake sale raised over **£250** which the Tavistock generously donated to the work of ALAG. **Ethney**

Disability Confident Events

In October 2016, the DWP organised three north London events inviting employers to learn about the benefits of employing disabled people and sign up to **Disability Confident**, which is replacing the two tick scheme. ALAG was invited to have a stall at these events to provide information to employers. Of the two events we took part in, the first was in the world famous Emirates stadium and the second in Southgate College where the local MP David Burrowes gave a speech highlighting the many untapped ways disabled people can bring value to the workplace. David noticed our stand and came over for a friendly chat and photo call. All in all, it was a great opportunity for ALAG to network and raise awareness of the benefits of employing people with ASC. *by Ethney*



Neil, Ethney, David Burrowes MP and Joe

ALAG is currently seeking new funding streams to continue its Employment and Peer Support Project. For further information email: info@alag.org.uk

V&A Museum visit

On Sunday 15th January, a few members of ALAG attended the **Victoria and Albert Museum** in South Kensington. I and two other members concentrated mostly on the Chinese and the Japanese sections. There were many interesting artefacts in both these sections including a throne used by one of the emperors. Other members went to different sections and were shown around by one of our number, Raj Tattal who is an expert on Sikh art. All in all it was an interesting and enjoyable day out.

by **Desmond Meldrum**

ALAG celebrated **World Autism Awareness Week 2016** with a trip to the Gielgud Theatre on Thursday 7th April to see **'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time'** It was a great night out and here's what one member had to say *I loved the way the audience were given an insight into Christopher's perception of the world, of language and of other people's behaviours. The play was full of surprises and was absolutely captivating. The lighting and sound effects as well as the stage itself were impressive and added to the unique experience of the play. I had a fantastic evening and would recommend it to anyone.* **Alex Jones**

The Autistic Adult Choir

The Autistic Adult Choir has been going since 2015 and has about 25 members, half of whom are members of ALAG. The Choir is the brainchild of Jill Bradford, CEO, Music for Autism International. We practice twice a month at St Martins in the Fields church and perform three or four times a year. Amongst our performances was the **ALAG Christmas Social** last December where we were given a very warm reception. In April we did a concert on **World Autism Awareness Day 2017** at the Arts Club in Mayfair and were accompanied by a full band. Sharing the bill with us was YouTube sensation Kaylee Rogers, an 11 year old autistic girl from Northern Ireland who has an amazing voice. We do classical and contemporary music and choir members choose most of what we sing. It's an exciting time and we are looking forward to performing at more events in the future. **by Hugh Rhodes**

To join the Autism Choir please email: jillbradford@musicforautismint.com

Sponsored Walk – September 2016

On a sunny afternoon in September, **ALAG** members set out on a sponsored walk in the beautiful setting of Trent Park in Barnet. Fuelled by a lovely lunch generously laid on for us by **Tesco**, Highbury, our members headed off on a 5k walk through the scenic, rambling footpaths of Trent park, specially mapped out for us by Desmond. Some of the more hardy members of the group enthusiastically went ahead whilst the slower ones trailed behind with the same enthusiasm. After a while, we were all reunited and ended the invigorating walk with a refreshing drink and snack at the café in the park.

Our wonderful members raised a total of £470 for ALAG! A big thank you to all who took part. by Ethney



ALAG members looking refreshed after the walk

Sally Knyvette

ALAG members were pleased to be invited by Sally Knyvette, the actress and director, to see her new play **BURNING BRIDGES**. On Wednesday 28 September twenty five ALAG members went along to Theatre503 in Battersea where they thoroughly enjoyed the evening. Here is a review of the play by one of our members.

"It was fascinating to see a play about a girl with Asperger syndrome, as there are so many stories of boys with AS. The play showed the tensions and sibling rivalry within a family. It also showed how emotionally overwhelming and depressing life can be for someone with AS. Throughout the play, it is revealed that whilst AS is life long, it is possible to learn certain cognitive and social skills over time, just not in the same way as a neurotypical person does. I found the play thought provoking and important for people with and without AS to see." **by Alex Jones**

In this edition we are 'catching up' on important events over the past year but in future newsletters we plan to report on more current news.

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Communication Workshops

ALAG was privileged to have the award winning actress Sally Knyvette present two communication workshops for us. These workshops provided opportunities for our members to receive communication tips and advice from a very friendly and talented expert. Here's what Aysen, one of the attendees had to say:

I enjoyed the workshop as it was in a smaller group. It was nice to have the opportunity to find out about some basic acting and communication skills and to practice them in the group. I felt there was enough time and it was well organised and fun. Sally was good at involving everybody and making us feel more relaxed and comfortable in the group.

Money Wise workshop

Our very own Financial Capability Trainer, **Jennifer Barker**, delivered three advice workshops on how to budget and how to get out of debt. This training was funded by a donation from **The Arsenal Foundation** for ALAG's **Peer Support project** in 2016. You can read the full report on our website

www.alag.org.uk/projects

Ethney



ALAG members at the Money Wise workshop

Did you know....?

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Arts, Health and Wellbeing said doctors should be encouraged to refer patients who suffer with depression and other mental health illnesses to art classes and poetry workshops. A new report calls for increased "social prescribing" to help patients to recover from physical and mental health problems and such activities helped recovery and maintenance of health, while reducing social isolation.

Your feedback and suggestions are always welcome. Contact: ethney@alag.org.uk