



Did You Know?

The Autism Spectrum and Noteworthy Supports

by GAIL M. CARROLL

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) affects many of us, in both our teaching and personal lives. Many of us are raising children on the spectrum and/or helping family members with children who have ASD. The good news is that there are many supports today that were not available a mere five years ago. This past year, I had the pleasure of broadening my education in ASD through my connections with you, as teachers. You helped push me out of my comfort zone during my quest to find answers for you and in doing so, I read many resources and met spectacular people doing incredible, pioneering work in the field of ASD.

One of the most interesting things I learned this past year is how easily ASD can be overlooked in some populations (i.e., young girls on the spectrum). Did you know that ASD in girls in particular can manifest differently than it does in boys? Most of the literature is focused on boys on the spectrum; however, Tania Marshall, a psychologist from Australia, has written two ground-breaking books: *I Am an Aspie Girl* and *I Am an Aspie Woman*. These books clearly depict differences between girls and boys with ASD and describe how girls are often overlooked. Some are not being diagnosed until they are adults! Tania has an interesting blog and her experiences working with kids and adults on the spectrum provide insightful tips and resources about ASD and ADHD. Another resource I found helpful is a book titled *Aspergirls: Empowering Females with Asperger Syndrome* by Rudy Simone. It is a great handbook with tips for parents and teachers on managing everything from behaviours to relationships.

An additional resource I found helpful for parents with newly-diagnosed children on the spectrum (boys and girls) is Dr. Tony Atwood's book, *The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome*. It discusses ASD fully, with information about High Functioning Autism and the new DSM V criteria. There are refer-

ences to other resources for any of us working with individuals on the spectrum. One of the books Dr. Atwood recommends is *Kids in the Syndrome Mix of ADHD, LD, and Autism Spectrum, Tourette's, Anxiety and More!* It is a one-stop guide for parents, teachers and other professionals written by Martin L. Kutscher, MD. Many clear, practical strategies are contained within this book!

I found other resources from Kelly Mahler, an occupational therapist, who introduces us to a concept in her book titled *Interoception: The Eighth Sensory System*. In this book, she demonstrates practical ways to improve self-regulation, self-awareness and social understanding in individuals with ASD and related disorders. The book is well illustrated with easy-to-follow charts and diagrams and is a great handbook for help with teaching these skills at any age. Her second book is *Sensory Issues and High Functioning Autism Spectrum and Related Disorders*, co-authored with Brenda Smith-Myles and Lisa A. Robbins. The handbook is another teacher resource that helps those on the spectrum find practical solutions to everyday problems. It shows what may be occurring when certain things are observed, and provides tips to help resolve any issues.

In addition to these resources, I had the pleasure of using Autism Society, Newfoundland Labrador's (ASNL) Elaine Dobbin Centre for Autism. The Centre is another resource for anyone seeking information about ASD – parents, students, teachers, other professionals. The trained staff is knowledgeable and eager to help. I enjoyed using the Barbara J. Hopkins Library and learning about its wide array of resources. Did you know that Autism Society NL, headquartered in St. John's, also has offices in Clarenville, Grand Falls-Windsor and Corner Brook?

During my visit to the Elaine Dobbin Centre, I met with Kendra Lane, Manager of Programs and Services with the Autism Society and a regular con-

tributor to *The Bulletin*. I referred several people Kendra's way because of her wealth of knowledge. She has been very helpful to both parents and teachers. The following information was provided by Kendra about services and resources available through ASNL.

The Autism Society offers a variety of services for families, professionals, and individuals on the spectrum. Resources at the Barbara J. Hopkins Library are also available across the province through our website. In addition to children's books, the library offers educational games, curriculum resources, teaching tools, and sensory items suitable for use by families or professionals. ASNL's outreach staff can visit classrooms and community groups throughout the province to deliver interactive peer awareness sessions that create empathy and understanding, bringing a better understanding of peers with different needs and abilities. ASNL is launching a new website and resource kit in Spring 2017 which will put updated information and navigational supports at the fingertips of those impacted by ASD.

"Autism in the Classroom" is a regular feature in *The Bulletin* and highlights different ways to support children, youth, and adults with ASD. Varied topics include: social skills enhancement; learning styles; resources; transition plans; and viewing challenging behaviour through an autism lens. Archived articles are available through ASNL's website. Each article aims to provide practical tools that can be applied in the home, school, or community. We encourage others to reach out, make topic suggestions for upcoming articles, and provide feedback. In this issue of *The Bulletin*, the article provides an overview of how ASNL's advocacy efforts focus on improving classroom experiences for teachers and their students on the spectrum.

For more information, please visit ASNL's website at www.autism.nf.net

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