

Autism

Awareness Month - April 2010

Respect goes a long way

FOR Christine Turnbull, mother of four, autism awareness month provides a great opportunity to educate people about autism. Three of her children have autism and two also have a visual impairment.

"Respect goes a long way. Families living with autism go through enough challenging and difficult times, so it's important to have people's understanding. The general population needs more education," she says.

"Our life is demanding and challenging beyond what you'd imagine. The hardest things are getting the right help for your children and

fighting for their rights. It has had a huge impact on our family."

When her first son, Lance now 18 was three, Christine knew he was different. But he wasn't formally diagnosed until he was older. Stephanie (16) and Isaac (14) were also diagnosed later in life.

"The late diagnosis makes it difficult. They have struggled through secondary school and will always need support and help.

"Autism is a real disability; it's not bad parenting or bad behaviour. They need the right support in place and the right understanding. The world makes no sense to them at all.

"The education system needs an overhaul and we need government funding which looks at the individual needs of families. There should be an autistic school in Bendigo - so many children are not coping in mainstream schools.

"My husband and I always need to supervise our children. We don't go out; we're always on the edge.

"The most rewarding part is that the children are unique. You love them no matter what. Your life is never going to be 'normal' it's far beyond that. You're caring for a soul who needs a whole lot of help and support.

"I joined the Bendigo Autism Asperger Group (BAAG) 18 months ago. It's wonderful to know that every other person there understands. No one judges you. They're all dealing with the same things on a day to day

basis. At BAAG there are also a number of professionals who can help you to fight through the maze of paperwork and services."

For more information on the group visit: www.bendigoautism.org.au.

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CHRISTINE Turnbull

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DISABILITY SERVICES

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Peter Harcourt Disability Services proudly supports people with Autism through our Northern Adult Autism Service.

Through the excellent work of our valued staff, our Adult Support Service provides a range of programs to assist people with a disability requiring complex support needs. At Peter Harcourt Disability Services our vision is creating dignity, opportunity and choice for people with a disability.

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Autism Awareness Month

Very few of us in Northern Victoria are untouched by Autism in one way or another.

Most of us have a family member, or know of friends and neighbours struggling to understand and deal with this frustratingly complex range of disorders.

It may seem that the numbers of people touched by Autism in our community – particularly in Northern Victoria – are simply exploding these days. But what we don't know is if this means we are more able to identify it now, and in fact the level of people with Autism disorders was always this high.

What surprises many families when they first confront it in their own lives is how little we understand, how wide the range of Autism Spectrum Disorders is and how sad it is that there is no immediate relief for many families.

Governments still don't understand the issues all that well, and therefore often don't do what they can to help people with Autism and their families. This has been a constant theme in my office since being elected to State Parliament in 2002.

In our community we are lucky to have dedicated, hard-working people who are trying to compile the full picture

on Autism. People such as Annie May who helped put together the recent, ground-breaking Autism Expo in Bendigo, linking families, therapists, researchers and government agencies.

Bendigo also has the equally innovative and hard-working Bendigo Autism Awareness Group.

It is appropriate that we have an Autism Awareness Month in Australia, because it is only through awareness and then linking problems with possible solutions that we will ever get anywhere on this.

I'd urge everyone to get personally involved in the community effort to understand and deal with Autism.

At the very least, we need to stand solidly beside those in need and those trying to make a difference.



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