



# Awareness Sheet 2011

People who have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) have neurological developmental differences, i.e. the brain processes information differently from the average person. It is important to understand that ASD is a life-long 'SPECTRUM' disorder, which means that every individual's personality and external traits are uniquely theirs. It also means that while one person may learn to function independently into and throughout adulthood, others may never acquire speech and require 24/7 care. Then there is everything in between.

Many autistic individuals, including those who are non-verbal, have an extremely high-level of intelligence, think outside the square, are creative in their thinking and can have an innate love for nature, technology, the arts, and science. Some of the most famous people in history are thought to have had autism, like Sir Isaac Newton.

Difficulties with auditory processing is common, while sensory processing challenges is a significant trait of ASD, although the severity in which a person is affected can vary greatly. Examples of common sensory challenges that can be experienced include: vision, touch, taste, sense of movement (vestibular system) & positional sense (proprioception). A person might not be able to eat a certain food because of its smell or texture, and another might have difficulty with touch or the feeling of particular fabrics on their skin because it irritates or hurts. Some may even experience pain whilst trying to undertake simple tasks such as hand writing, requiring technological tools for assistance (e.g. tablet computer).

Autistic people often experience system/sensory overload, which causes the body to become reactive. Unfortunately, most people who don't understand autism or understand what it is like to experience sensory overload, will come to the conclusion that this reaction is naughty or strange behaviour when it simply isn't.

Difficulties with communication, understanding language, and developing social relationships are experienced. If you talk to an autistic person and they don't make eye contact, it isn't because they aren't listening or being rude, it is because they see every detail on your face and it becomes overwhelming with too much information to process.

There is no greater joy experienced by a parent than when their autistic child reaches a milestone like responding to their name, speaking their first word, or making their first friend. Autistic people have been known to overcome unbelievable odds largely due to the love and dedication of their support network and a lot of hard work and determination on their part. In too many cases, however, families are left to deal with their daily challenges in isolation because of the lack of community understanding and available support services.

***"If someone cannot learn in the way we teach, we must teach in a way that a person can learn." ~ author unknown***

**WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP...** With the right level of support, understanding and social opportunities from the community at large, young autistic people can be supported by various means to enable them to complete a meaningful education and to reach their potential in life. Supported social integration is more often than not a very important part of developmental success.

With the same level of support, autistic adults are able to utilise their intelligence, skills and extensive knowledge on subjects of interest in independent or supported employment.