



# Autism Advisory & Support Service Annual Report 2010

“Empowering children with Autism and their families  
through knowledge & support”



AASS HOUSE  
88 Memorial Avenue  
Liverpool NSW 2170  
Ph: 02 9601 2844 (Mon - Fri 9.30am - 2pm)  
**24 Hour Autism Hotline 1300 222 777**  
E: [info@aass.org.au](mailto:info@aass.org.au)  
W: [www.aass.org.au](http://www.aass.org.au)

Index

3 Incorporation  
3 Charitable status, tax concessions and fundraising  
4 Presidents Report  
5 The AASS Executive Committee  
7 Summary  
8 Mission  
8 Objectives  
9 Services  
10 Support Groups  
11 Social Groups  
12 Autism and Toy Library  
12 Disability Summit  
13 Sydney Symphony Toy Orchestra  
14 24 Hour Autism Hotline



## Incorporation

Autism Advisory and Support Service Inc ABN 63 073 684 085 is a not for profit incorporated association. Its members are the current Committee. Its registered office is located at 88 Memorial Ave Liverpool NSW 2170.

## Charitable status, tax concessions and fundraising

Autism Advisory and Support Service is a Health Promotion Charity (HPC). It is endorsed as an Income Tax Exempt Charity and receives certain other tax concessions and exemptions consistent with its status as a HPC which relate to Goods and Services and Fringe Benefits taxes. Autism Advisory and Support Service has been endorsed by the Australian Taxation Office as a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR). Autism Advisory and Support Service is registered under applicable fundraising legislation as required in NSW where it raises funds as follows: New South Wales: Registration number CFN 21161



## Presidents Report

It has been an amazing journey that leads AASS to the end of the 2009/10 financial year. We started the new financial year as an incorporated association having being auspiced by Community First Step since our inception in 2007. We moved into our office “AASS House” in July and we provided assistance to those with Autism and their families and service providers in many ways including:

- Received our first major grants for a new fence, sensory garden and social group for young adults with Autism
- Started an evening and Chinese Support Group at Liverpool
- Developed a support group in Marayong,
- Began the social group for young adults with Autism combining them with neuro typical peers/mentors
- Formed a partnership with UWS Campbelltown School of Medicine
- Hosted a Disability Summit which produced a 6 page letter that was sent to every State and Federal Politician in Australia.
- Commenced Australia’s only 24 Hour Autism Hotline in time for Christmas 2009
- Hosted members of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra who played to 550 excited children with additional needs and their carers
- Began work on the sensory garden
- Held our 2<sup>nd</sup> annual charity ball
- Began a Saturday respite group for 7 to 12 year olds
- Commenced the audio/visual library and toy library
- Cheer for a Steer fundraiser for the 24 hour Hotline

We also continued to meet with Government officials and Politicians, provide individual advocacy and provide telephone and face to face guidance and advice to families needing support after their diagnosis. This was all achieved by volunteers and with no recurrent funding.

And the journey continues. We look forward to sharing it with you.

Yours sincerely

Grace Fava  
President



## The AASS Executive Committee



**Grace Fava JP**  
Founder and President

Grace has worked in many diverse fields including Pharmacy, Office Administration and Accounts receivable for various organisations. Her passion for Autism was ignited when searching for services for her two boys who both regressed with Autism and Global Developmental Delay.

Grace is responsible for the day to day running of AASS and overseeing all aspects of the organisation.



**Fiona Zammit B Ed**  
Vice President, Secretary

Fiona has a Bachelor of Education and has worked for the past 16 years as a Primary School Teacher.

Fiona is a founding member of AASS.

Fiona is responsible for all banking aspects of AASS and is an integral part of all AASS fundraisers.



**Bassema Ghaznavi**  
Treasurer

Certificate IV in Community Services (Employment Services) with a focus on Disabilities

Bassema is a founding member of AASS.

Bassema currently works as an Employment Consultant with a Disability Employment Service assisting and supporting people with a disability in all areas of work, work experience and study.



**Korrine Miller B Ed (EC)**

Korrine has a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) and Small Business Certificate. Korrine joined the AASS Committee in 2008.

Korrine has worked as a casual teacher with the Department of Education, and six years in Early Childhood Education with roles including Authorised Supervisor, Teacher and Director. Korrine is currently studying a postgraduate certificate in Special Education (High Support Needs) and a certificate IV in Training and Assessing. Korrine is also President of the P&C of Marayong Preschool-Kindergarten. Korrine is the Coordinator/facilitator of the Marayong parent support group and represents AASS on the ECICP for Blacktown/Mt Druitt.



**Tracey Diec B Bus, B Teach**

Tracey has a Bachelor of Business and a Bachelor of Teaching

Tracey joined the AASS committee in 2008

Tracey is the coordinator/facilitator for the Chinese Support Group and Chinese Family Support.



**Leah Bradley**

Leah has an associate diploma in Accounting

Leah joined the AASS Committee in 2009

Leah is the coordinator of the AASS 24 Hour Autism Hotline, Co-ordinator/facilitator of the Monday night support group and coordinator of the Social Group for young Adults with ASD. Leah is currently studying a Diploma of Counselling and a Bachelor of Applied Social Science (Counselling)

## Summary

Autism Advisory and Support Service (AASS) was established in 2007 by a group of parents from South Western Sydney to fill the void in the health care sector encountered by families of children with Autism.

AASS was established as a support and network/advisory service to empower children with Autism and their families through knowledge and support, and to positively impact and influence their children's social and emotional development.

It is run by volunteers and has the legal status as a not for profit incorporated charity. AASS relies on funding grants, donations and sponsorships to meet its operational costs. Despite these financial obstacles AASS has grown in size and been able to expand its range of service delivery.

Since its inception AASS has:

- opened the AASS Community house/drop in centre, located in Memorial Avenue, Liverpool;
- established, coordinate and host support groups;
- established, coordinate and host respite programs;
- runs a parent library, toy library,
- Established, coordinate and facilitate Australia's only 24 hour Autism hotline.

AASS continues to provide these services free of charge to the parents, carers and service providers of children with Autism.

The service began by supporting families in South West Sydney and now has grown as a support service to families in Western Sydney and in every state of Australia. It handles approximately 200 enquiries/cases per month.



**Our Mission:**

- To empower children with Autism and their families through knowledge and support
- To positively impact and influence their social and emotional development

**Our Objectives:**

- To advise and assist children with Autism and their families.
- To provide support and information to parents of children with Autism.
- To do this at a free or nominal price for families affected by Autism.
- To engage relevant stakeholders that can make a valid contribution to the development of service and facilities for children with Autism and their families.
- To be a source of information of Autism services.
- To seek funding to sustain development of Autism Advisory and Support Service





## Services

AASS does not currently receive any regular government funding, instead relying on donations, fundraising and grants to operate their service.

Today, AASS is still run by unpaid volunteer parents who all have children with Autism. These parents have a diverse set of skills and come from varied professional backgrounds, offering unique expertise to AASS. Those professions include; education, nursing and business management.

In addition to the professional skill set the Executive Committee members bring to AASS, as parents of children with Autism, they understand the right of the family and the individual with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), to make decisions based on what they feel is best for their situation. Individuals on the spectrum should enjoy the same rights and opportunities as their neurotypical peers.

AASS fills the gap in service provision that exists, and do so, at no charge to families affected. This is important, as studies have shown that raising a child with a disability costs at least three times more than raising a child without a disability.<sup>1</sup> Government funding focuses on early intervention, so families of children above the age of 6, need to find the money to pay for private services. This costs on average \$150 to \$200 per child per week for forty five minutes of speech therapy and forty five minutes of occupational therapy.

The main benefit that AASS provides is that we do can personally identify with the issues faced by parents accessing our service. We have all experienced the isolation and grief that a diagnosis brings; the frustration of searching for affordable and appropriate services; the battle to find a suitable educational environment for our children; the guilt connected with focusing on the child with the disability and not enough attention on other children; the burden of wondering what will become of our children when they are older.

So when a family comes to AASS for assistance, our empathy and understanding is real. We have learnt about ASD from life, not a textbook. We understand that ASD should not be approached with a “one size fits all” attitude. This unique approach brings families coming back to volunteer when they are more comfortable with their situation. We do not need to advertise our service, as word of mouth in particular from other service providers, keeps us very busy.

For parents and carers waiting for a formal assessment and diagnosis, looking for the right intervention and joining the long waiting lists can be extremely overwhelming, confusing and frustrating. AASS provides unbiased advice, encouragement, guidance and support.



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/paying-care-cost-childhood-disability>

## Support Groups

These are held on a monthly basis (excluding school holidays). They are held in two locations, the AASS House at Liverpool and Marayong Preschool at Marayong (Blacktown area). We also have a Cantonese/Mandarin Support Group which is facilitated in Liverpool.

Families can often feel overwhelmed and alone when faced with questions that Autism brings. Our support groups are designed so we may come together to support one another and share our experiences.

Our support groups also host a number of varied service providers and professionals who provide valuable information to families. These guest speakers prove to be popular with families desperate to learn as much as they can to assist their loved ones.



## Social Group

The social group attended by Adolescents and Adults Affected by ASD, Neurotypical Peers/Mentors and AASS volunteers is held once a month in various social settings. Young adults with ASD learn much craved for social skills from their peers/mentors. The peers are University students studying in the fields of Medicine, Occupational and Speech Therapies, Psychology and Teaching.

The young adults with ASD gain skills and self esteem while the mentors gain experience in dealing with youths and the uniqueness that is Autism, while taking their invaluable experience with them in their future careers.



## Autism and Toy Library

We have an extensive range of books, magazines and DVD's on Autism in a variety of language for loan. The range of books include information on therapies, diets, educational settings and requirements, teaching of social skills and how families can support each other. There are many books in the library that have been written by individuals on the spectrum.

## Disability Summit

AASS hosted Disability Summit in October 2009. The Summit was attended by over 30 service providers and parents from various disability backgrounds. Delegates at the Summit compiled a letter outlining what changes were required in the disability sector.

The letter was sent to every Federal and State politician in Australia and some councils as well. Many of our recommendations are now being addressed as part of the NDIS and other government initiatives.



### Sydney Symphony Toy Orchestra

Most children with Autism have a natural affinity to music. AASS captured this in our annual toy orchestra in partnership with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Held at Mt Pritchard Community Club, 550 special needs children and their carers were first mesmerised by the heavenly sounds of the music. They were then invited to pick up their instruments, provided by AASS, and led by the conductor, joined in the fun. Children who were usually introverted let their hair down singing and conducting to the classics.



## 24 Hour Autism Hotline

AASS developed Australia's only 24 hour Autism hotline at the end of 2009. We took our idea to the Federal Government for funding and were refused. Understanding the lack of any similar service that operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, Autism specific where the phone is answered first time or your call is returned within a few hours, AASS were determined to fundraise to make this necessity a reality.

Today the hotline takes an average of 100 calls per month from around Australia from families in crisis, Medical professionals and service providers asking for assistance for their patients and siblings and friends wanting more information on Autism so they can better understand the disorder. While some requests for assistance can be quickly resolved, many require days and sometimes months of follow up.

Our main source of income to fund the hotline is our annual "Cheer for a Steer" fundraiser. It also allows AASS to raise awareness on Autism in rural areas.

