



Our Story...



About Daisy Chain...

Daisy Chain began life in 2003 as the dream of its founder, Lesley Hanson, whose son Jacob was diagnosed with autism at an early age.

Although Jacob's condition was not severe, Lesley soon became aware of the problems faced by the parents & carers of children who were higher on the autistic spectrum.

Lesley dreamt of a haven for children with autism; a place where they could go to experience something in life that would give them pleasure & was especially for them. The centre would include an overnight respite facility, playroom, sensory areas, animal barn, agricultural & horticultural opportunities & nature trails. It would also provide parents, carers & siblings with support & a resource library.

Disgruntled with the lack of facilities & services available to support families, Lesley & husband Duane set off on a quest to make her dream become a reality. After extensive fundraising, the doors to Daisy Chain opened one year after her initial dream & it has continued to grow ever since.

Now, many years later, the charity:

- Helps more than 1,700 families in the Tees Valley
- Supports 581 children each week
- Provides 599 hours of respite per week

We are continuing to develop our facilities & services all the time. Lesley died in 2004, but to ensure her dream still lives on, we need your help...



About Autism...

Autism is a lifelong developmental disability, sometimes referred to as an autism spectrum condition (ASC) which affects the way in which a person communicates & relates to people around them. People with autism share three main areas of difficulty (social communication, social interaction & social imagination) which are measured on a "spectrum" but their condition will affect them in very different ways. For instance, some people are able to live relatively normal lives, whilst others will require a lifetime of specialist support.

Identifying that a person has autism can sometimes be difficult, as people with the condition do not "look" disabled. Therefore, parents of children with autism often say that other people simply think their child is naughty, while adults with ASC believe they are misunderstood.

Everyone with autism can benefit from a timely diagnosis & access to appropriate services & support.

What causes autism?

The exact cause of autism is still being investigated. However, research suggests that a combination of factors - genetic & environmental - may account for changes in brain development. People from all nationalities & cultural, religious & social backgrounds can have autism, although it appears to affect more men than women. It is not caused by a person's upbringing or their social circumstances & is not the fault of the individual with the condition.

Is there a cure?

At present, there is no "cure" for autism. However, there are a range of interventions, which enable learning & development, that can be helpful for the individual.



Characteristics of Autism...



The characteristics of autism vary from one person to another, but are generally divided into three main difficulties, which are sometimes known as the "triad of impairments": social communication, social interaction & social imagination.

Social Communication - people with autism can have difficulties with the use & interpretation of both verbal & non-verbal language. This can cause difficulties in expressing themselves & understanding the intended language of others - for instance, when using or interpreting facial expressions, tone of voice, jokes & sarcasm, & common phrases or sayings.

Social Interaction - socialising is something that most people take for granted, but for someone with autism, understanding how to interact is a major barrier. The difficulty lies in the person not being able to recognise or understand others emotions & feelings, & their inability to express their own. Some examples of this would be that they appear to be insensitive because they have not recognised how someone else is feeling, or appear to behave "strangely" or inappropriately, as it is not always easy for them to express feelings, emotions or needs.

Social Imagination - this allows us to understand & predict other people's behaviour, make sense of abstract ideas & to imagine situations outside of our immediate daily routine. Difficulties with social imagination means that people with autism find it hard to understand & interpret others thoughts, understand the concept of danger, prepare for change & plan for the future, & cope in new or unfamiliar surroundings.

In addition to the triad of impairments, other related characteristics include the love of routines, sensory sensitivity, special interests & learning disabilities.



Love of Routine - the world can seem a very unpredictable & confusing place to people with autism, who often prefer to have a fixed daily routine so that they know what is going to happen every day. Rules can also be important; it may be difficult for a person with autism to take a different approach to something once they have been taught the "right" way to do it. People with autism may not be comfortable with the idea of change but can cope well if they are prepared for it in advance.

Sensory Sensitivity - people with autism may experience some form of sensory sensitivity. This can occur in one or more of the five senses - sight, sound, smell, touch & taste. A person's senses are either intensified (hypersensitive) or under-sensitive (hypo-sensitive). For instance, a person with autism may find certain background sounds, which other people ignore or block out, unbearably loud or distracting. This can cause anxiety or even physical pain. People who are hypo-sensitive may not feel pain or extremes of temperature. Some may rock, spin or flap their hands to stimulate sensation, to help with balance & posture or to deal with stress.

Special Interests - many people with autism have intense special interests, often from a fairly young age. These can change over time or be lifelong, & can be anything from art to music, to trains or computers. Some people with autism may eventually be able to work or study in related areas, whilst for others it will remain a hobby.

Learning Disabilities - People with autism may have learning disabilities, which can affect all aspects of their lives, from studying in school, to learning how to wash themselves or make a meal. As with autism, people can have different "degrees" of learning disability, so some will be able to live fairly independently - although they may need a degree of support to achieve this - while others may require lifelong, specialist support. However, all people with autism can, & do, learn & develop with the right sort of support.





Autism myths...

- Is a middle class disorder
- Is due to bad parenting
- Is just an excuse or results from bad behaviour
- Always occurs with an area of genius
- Is another term for learning difficulties
- Once speech begins, other difficulties disappear

Autism facts...

- Is a developmental disorder involving the brain
- Is a lifelong disability
- Is genetically linked
- Is more common in boys than girls
- May be accompanied by learning difficulties
- Those affected may experience the world differently - be over/under sensitive to their environment

Possible Observed Behaviours...

- Shouting
- Physical aggression
- Running away
- Covering ears
- Repetitive banging
- Self-harm
- Anxiety/panic attacks
- Rituals/obsessions
- Phobias
- Withdrawal
- Passivity
- Swearing
- Sleeping problems
- Under/over eating
- Digestive problems
- Inappropriate social responses



Some ASC strengths...

- Excellent organisational skills
- Precision, accuracy & neatness
- Exceptional attention to detail
- Highly specialised knowledge in a particular area
- Excellent rote memory: can recall facts & figures with ease
- Honesty
- Persistence & reliability
- Exceptionally good visual memories

Imagine...

...you have just landed on another planet & you didn't know the inhabitants, their language, their customs, how they interact or how you should behave in their presence.

...trying to find your way around a foreign country with only jumbled signposts to follow & directions that you can only partially understand.

...not being able to talk, use your hands, use facial expressions or gestures & you had not been taught sign language.

...hearing ten T.V. sets all at once & not being able to tune into any of them.

For a person with autism, ordinary situations can feel just like this.

Chris Mitchell, June 2008



A photograph of a man with a grey beard and glasses, wearing a green t-shirt, sitting on a black stool and playing an acoustic guitar. He is looking towards a group of children. A young girl in a white shirt and red skirt is reaching out towards the guitar. Another child is lying on the floor in the foreground. The background is a light-colored wall with some papers pinned to it. The bottom of the page is decorated with a green grass border.

Our services...

Activity Days

Our Activity Days are for families & young people in the Tees Valley affected by ASC. Come & enjoy our soft play, petting farm, outdoor playground & lots of other indoor & outdoor activities. Siblings are welcome too!

Social Groups and Youth clubs

We run a number of Social Groups & Youth Clubs for young people with ASC aged 5-17. The sessions are structured & provide opportunities for interactions & friendships between young people.

Adult Group

The Adult Group is for adults aged 18-30 with a diagnosis of autism. The group take part in planned activities & social outings, & meet each Monday during term time. They also enjoy special activities planned for during the school holidays.

Toddler Group

Our Toddler Group is for children under 5 with any additional needs & their parents/ carers. The group aims to bring families in similar situations together to allow them to share experiences & interact whilst the children can have fun in the sensory play area & ball pool.

Training

We offer training to a variety of groups, such as parents, local businesses & service providers, & work closely with others who have a specialist knowledge of autism.

Links

Links is for parents & carers of children who have an Autism Spectrum Condition, or who have children going through the diagnostic process, & meets each Thursday morning during term time. The weekly programme is varied, with interesting speakers, & an opportunity for an informal chat & light refreshments on the first Thursday of the month. A crèche facility is also available to enable parents/carers to attend.

Sibz

Our Sibz Group caters for siblings of children with autism, & is suitable for young people aged between 8-16. The group meets fortnightly & enjoy outings, activity evenings & occasional education sessions, which help the young people understand more about autism.

Holiday Activities

We run a variety of activities throughout the school holidays, including additional activity days, short break sessions, day trips & soft play sessions.

Advice, Support and Guidance

One-to-one support with strategies & help to understand Autism Spectrum Conditions is available, by appointment, with a member of the Care Team. The team can work with children & young people as well as parents/carers.

Employability

We run an Employability Course to support young adults with autism to gain experience in a number of entry-level roles within our retail arm, such as working in the coffee shop, warehouse, customer services, logistics & pricing. The course then looks to extend the students work experience by developing supported work placements.

For full details of all our services, please see our Activities Brochure



How you can help...

As a Regular Giver...

You can become a supporter of Daisy Chain by becoming a Regular Giver &, for as little as £5 a month, you can support the vital work of Daisy Chain & help transform lives across the Tees Valley. By making a regular donation, you can help us to plan for the future by knowing that we will have a steady income stream that we can rely upon.

As a company...

You can become a Friend of Daisy Chain, which is an exciting network for companies & organisations who are supporting us with our vision. You can involve your staff in fundraising events, activities & community days, which are great team-building opportunities, & raise your company profile through sponsorship.

As a Fundraiser...

You can support Daisy Chain by attending one of our events, taking part in charity runs or treks & challenges. You can even do your own thing, such as hosting a coffee morning, wine tasting, shaving your head, growing a zany moustache, jumping out of a plane or arranging your own dinner or ball - the possibilities are endless!



As a Volunteer...

Volunteers are required in all areas of our services including retail, children's activities, fundraising, gardening & animal care. We have volunteers who commit from once a day to once a year in a variety of roles to suit them & their individual situation. Whatever your skills, whatever you can offer - even if it's just your time - you can help us to make a difference!

Donate to our Superstore...

We accept a wide variety of donated items, from large items of furniture & dining room sets to smaller items like children's toys, books, bric a brac, jewellery & clothes - all of which can be sold at our Superstore on Portrack Lane to raise funds. Our Employability Students put their skills into practice at our store, & the presence in such a predominant position helps us massively to raise awareness of our cause.

Sponsor an Animal...

From only £5 a month, you can make a difference & help us care for our animals in our petting farm & to continue providing a unique learning opportunity for our children. Sponsorship of our animals also makes an excellent gift, & we have many for you to choose from!

Play People's Postcode Lottery...

People's Postcode Lottery is a charity lottery that raises funds for good causes like Daisy Chain & increases awareness of our activities, enabling us to achieve much more than ever before. For your chance to win big & support Daisy Chain at the same time, why not sign up today?





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Daisy Chain
A haven for families affected by autism