ACTIVITIES
• European Days of Autism 2009
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• Invitation - General Assembly 2010 in Kassel

SPECIAL FEATURE ON AGEING

PROJECT
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IX INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
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IX International Congress
AUTISM-EUROPE
A FUTURE FOR AUTISM

Catania, Italy
8-10 October 2010
Dear Friends,

On behalf of Autism-Europe’s executive committee and secretariat, receive our best wishes for a Happy New Year!

2010 is the European Year against poverty and for social inclusion. Persons with disabilities and their families are very often the first ones to be affected by an economic downturn. But, we also know that persons with autism suffer from exclusion even in better times because they are denied access to education, adapted care and services in the community.

Raising their voice is our mission and we will pursue this objective in 2010 and continue to defend the rights of persons with Autism at the European level. The European Commission is currently preparing a new EU Disability Strategy for 2010 to 2020. The latter will shape the disability policies of the European Union for the next decade and Autism-Europe will be active raising awareness of the specific needs of persons with Autism. This is all the more important that on 26 November 2009, the Council of the European Union decided on the European Community becoming a party to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). As you may know, the UNCRPD binds the States Parties to a revision of all existing legislation, policies and programs to ensure they are in compliance with its provisions.

As for national initiatives, some political developments in various EU Member States in favour of persons with autism are presented in this issue. Positive evolutions have happened across the EU in the field of social inclusion, education, etc. We hope that their implementation will go smoothly in 2010 and we will be glad to continue sharing good practices from across Europe!

Several major events are planned by Autism-Europe in 2010. The Annual General Assembly will take place in Kassel (Germany) at the beginning of June and you are all warmly invited to attend this event that will be co-hosted by AE and Autismus Deutschland. In October 2010, the IX Autism-Europe Congress will take place in Catania, Italy. The Congress entitled “A Future for Autism” will build on the most recent advances in scientific knowledge and contemporary approaches to disability in order to investigate the best possible future for persons with ASD and their families. You can already register for this landmark event! At this occasion, we will also celebrate the 2010 European Days of Autism.

We look forward to pursuing our actions in cooperation with you in 2010. Autism-Europe thanks you for your involvement and support!

Evelyne Friedel
President Autism-Europe

Aurélie Baranger
Director
European Days of Autism - 3 and 4 October 2009 - Madrid

High level conference

On 3 and 4 October 2009, Autism-Europe celebrated the European Days of Autism in Madrid in cooperation with the Spanish Consortium for Autism, comprised of Autismo España and Fespau.

On October 3rd, an international conference gathered more than 200 participants. During the opening session, Evelyne Friedel stressed the necessity to fight for the rights of persons with disabilities during the Spanish Presidency of the EU, starting in January 2010. During the opening session, Francisco Moza Zapatero, from the General Secretariat for Social Policy and Consumers, emphasized the commitment of the Spanish government to foster the rights and inclusion of persons with disabilities, even in time of crisis.

Then, Joaquin Fuentes presented to participants Autism-Europe's document: Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Identification, Understanding, Intervention that he drafted with other European experts: Catherine Barthélémy, Patricia Howlin and Rutger van der Gaag.

Jim Mansell from the Tizard Institute (University of Kent) then gave a presentation about Community-based services and the way to include people with the most complex needs. He stressed the benefits of active support to involve people in meaningful activities and improve their lives.

Active support users’ involvement and quality of services are closely linked. Ramon Barinaga presented the way Gautena (Spain) respond to the challenge of quality management. Finally, Lydia Daniels, Director of Autism Accreditation at the National Autistic Society presented the mission and core standards of the Autism Accreditation that has developed a framework to measure and evaluate best practices through self audit of its members.
Autism-Europe’s Extraordinary General Assembly and Council of Administration

After the conference, Autism-Europe’s members gathered for an Extraordinary General Assembly (EGA). During the meeting, amendments to AE statutes were voted in order to ensure a better representativeness of EU countries within the Council of Administration. AE members also voted in favour of welcoming a new affiliated member association from Hungary, the “Foundation for children with Special disability”.

The EGA was followed by a Council of Administration (CA) meeting on Saturday afternoon and Sunday. The CA discussed the implementation of Autism-Europe’s activities. They also had the opportunity to share information about important developments for persons with ASD in their countries. These developments have also been highlighted in the press release disseminated at the occasion of the European Days of Autism (please see below).

During the meeting a new CA member was coopted: Miroslava Jelinkova from Autistik in Czech Republic.

The Council of Administration is very pleased to welcome Miroslava on board since she has been active for many years in Autism-Europe and involved as a partner in several projects with AE.

Autism-Europe would like to thank both Presidents of Fespau and Autismo España: Isabel Bayonas and Antonio de la Iglesia Soriano and their team for their invitation and cooperation to organize these events and celebration of the European Day of Autism 2009. The next Annual General Assembly and Council of Administration will take place on 5 and 6 June in Kassel Germany. On 4 June, participants will have the possibility to take part in a visit organized by Autismus Deutschland.

For more information, please contact Autism-Europe: secretariat@autismeurope.org
At the occasion of the European Days of Autism, Autism-Europe released a statement welcoming the latest policy developments meant to improve the quality of life and respect of the rights of persons with autism in several EU member states.

In Hungary, a 5-years Strategy for Autism has been commissioned by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and drafted by experts as a recommendation under the supervision of the Hungarian Autistic Society (HAS). The Strategy aims at improving care for persons with ASD notably by developing specific services for persons with ASD, improving diagnosis, as well as access to education (including training for adults). One of the objectives is also to train staff to care for persons with ASD and to provide support for families. Another target is to develop employment opportunities for persons with ASD. The Hungarian government has recently released a governmental decree for its implementation. HAS would first like to develop an autism specific quality management system.

In the UK, a Private Members Bill, drafted by The National Autistic Society (NAS) and taken forward by Conservative MP Cheryl Gillan has made it through its final parliamentary stage and will now become the Autism Act. The Bill was backed by a coalition of 16 autism organisations and had overwhelming parliamentary support, being backed by all the main political parties. The Act is the first ever disability-specific law in England. The Autism Act will guarantee the introduction of the first-ever adult autism strategy, which will set out how local services should be improved to meet the needs of adults with autism. The strategy will cover a range of issues including health, social care, employment and training and, crucially, will be accompanied by guidance which places a legal obligation on local authorities and NHS bodies to meet certain requirements. The strategy will be published by April 2010 and the accompanying legal guidance no later than December 2010.

In France, the first anniversary of the French Plan for Autism 2008-2010 was celebrated in May 2009. This plan with a budget of 187 million Euros aims at increasing availability of adapted educational settings for children with ASD while promoting innovative methods of care for them. The emphasis is also laid on improving diagnosis. In Italy and Spain, governments have adopted guidelines on Autism in close cooperation with the stakeholders including associations of families of persons with ASD. Nevertheless efforts should be made for their enforcement at regional and local level.

In Portugal, an important law (3/2008 published on 7 January 2008) on Inclusive Education reinforces the previous law and provides that every child must go to public school. Article 25 is devoted especially to the education of children with autism and creates Unities of Structured Teaching where they can receive special support so they are able to follow the regular classes in their schools. In 2009, 1080 children with autism (5 to 14 years old) are included in Portuguese public schools in about 180 units.

Meanwhile, in Greece, following a law adopted in 2008, children with Autism are recognized for the first time as requiring, like children with other disabilities, special education by specialized teachers in mainstream schools. However, the Ministry of Education has repeatedly failed to implement this law, by providing partial, delayed or inadequate special educational support, on the grounds of lack of funds or adequately trained teachers. In June 2009, after numerous parents’ complaints, the Independent Authority of “Citizens Advocate” has issued a Statement recognizing the violation of the law by the State and proposing specific measures to ensure its application.

Aurélie Baranger
We are all getting older. The effects are physical and social

The rights of ageing people with autism

«The desire to provide appropriate services to elderly people with autism is consistent with the history of the NAS in seeking to find imaginative and practical responses to problems… outline the way forward which will inform future planning»
(NAS Working Party report 2005)

Few (conferences) have approached the problem of ageing persons who also happen to be disabled for different reasons than those resulting from ageing”

“We cannot wait for the answers before we take action. We need to do something now”
(NAS: Autism and Ageing, Communication, November 2008)

“Information must be shared globally; research prioritised… The Institute for Ageing and Health would be an excellent place to bring together the disciplines this cause calls for”
(NAS: “We worry for them: reflections of a parent”, Communication, March 2009).

And it happened, even if thirteen years after the NAS’ 1996 truism. The first national - perhaps global - meeting “What About Old Age” at Newcastle University organised by the Institute for Ageing and Health, sponsored and supported by the NAS, Autism Speaks, Wakehurst Trust, Autism-Europe, MENCAP and AGE, took place on 29th October 2009. It was opened by parent, campaigner and NAS Councillor, Mrs. Virginia Bovell.

If ageing in people with autism was a future issue in 1996, in autumn of 2009, it became a present one. The demographics of ageing process have substantially changed over the last few decades, and it is currently estimated that by 2026 in the UK alone, another 1.7 million adults will need some type of care. At least, 17,000 of them will be adults with autistic spectrum conditions (ASC). The diminishing resources in the social and health care sectors necessary to meet these growing, and what appears to be, unpredictable needs dominated this first meeting of some 60 participants with a particular focus on cognitive and neurological ageing in ASC.

So soon, after the meeting, it has not proved possible to summarise usefully all the interventions and provide a comprehensive report. Moreover, for internal reasons at the UK Government’s Welsh Office, the long awaited survey findings and recommendations in Wales on ASC and ageing have not yet been published. We expect to report on the survey results and on the meeting in another issue of ‘Link’. But since the Welsh survey is the first of its kind known to us, it will give some reality to the more - so far - theoretical issues that occupied the attention of the meeting. Yet in the words of Prof. Ian Stuart-Hamilton who led the survey: “the problems faced by our participants were chronic and serious... potentially life-threatening... the simple presence of ASD symptoms, rather than its depth was the key issue...” His findings, based on a small number able to complete a questionnaire indicated “much more serious problems, in the groups that have not assisted in this study”. The sample was not demographically representative; so that, important for Autism-Europe and its members, Prof. Stuart-Hamilton “would welcome the prospect of carrying out collaborative research”. We have given space to the Welsh survey, conducted by
Glamorgan University since this was the only call for collaboration. Prof. Stuart-Hamilton may be contacted at: istuarth@glam.ac.uk.

This is not to minimise or sideline the depth and range of other contributions. On policies including services and strategies, Prof. Cottinelli Telmo (Autism-Europe), Ms Elaine Hill (UK Govt Dept of Health), Dr. de la Cuesta (NAS), Dr. Fitzpatrick (parent and general practitioner) and Prof. Stuart-Hamilton, were followed by a session on clinical and psychological research with Prof. Holland (Cambridge) - memory and learning disability, Prof. Bowler (London) - behaviour and ASC, Prof. O'Brien (Northumberland) - offending behaviour, Prof. Starr (Edinburgh) - physical health, and Prof. Regnard (St Oswalds Hospice) on how to identify distress in severe /non-communicating adults. The afternoon session was devoted to clinical and scientific research. Prof. le Couteur (Newcastle) explored lessons learned from interventions in children and young people. Dr. James and Mrs MacKenzie (Northumberland Mental Health Service) related a case history of Aspergers in a care setting. This session concluded with contributions from four neuroscientists, Prof. Esiri (Oxford), Prof. Perry, Drs. Parr and Mukaetova-Ladinska (Newcastle University). This intensive day closed with workshops - discussion and conclusions- on meeting the needs of the elderly with ASC, Dr. Mills and Ms Povey (NAS Director of Research, and Head of Adult Services); and on research needs (Profs. Perry and Esiri, and Dr Mukaetova-Ladinska).

For the immediate future, it is vital not to lose momentum, and the wide interest being generated across “autistic communities” in these complex and demanding needs that are closing in on the first European generation to have been diagnosed with an ASC... So we are actively considering the formation of an inter-organisational group to build on the enthusiasm and commitment of those who took part on October 29th; and one name suggested so far is IAGFA-International Autism Group For Ageing. In our next report we hope to indicate how our “What about old age” should move forward.

European organisations that wish to be kept informed should e-mail their interest, with name and address to:

Alyson Goldwater:
alyson.goldwater@newcastle.ac.uk

Prof Elaine Perry,
Dr. Elizabeta Mukaetova-Ladinska,
Michael Baron.

December 2009

R ecommendation of the Council of Europe on ageing and disability in the 21st century

On 8 July 2009 the European Council’s Committee of Ministers addressed a recommendation on ageing and persons with disabilities to Member States.

Beforehand it should be underlined that this recommendation makes a clear distinction between “ageing people with disabilities” and “older people with disabilities”. The first group refers to people who grow old having experienced a disability for much of their lives, sometimes from birth. For the second group, disability is first experienced at a relatively advanced age.

The broad outlines of the Council of Europe new recommendation aim at promoting autonomy and an independent life of ageing people with disabilities; enhancing the quality of services and ensuring equal access to those services.

The Council of Europe indicates that ageing of people with disabilities, particularly of those requiring more intensive support, compels Member States to adopt innovative approaches. In this regard, the Council of Europe notes that “the quantity and quality of community-based and residential support services in this field have been unsatisfactory, especially for people with learning disabilities. Older people with disabilities have suffered a double disadvantage, as seen in their relatively low priority in health- and social-care policies and provision.”

With due regard for their own national, regional or local structures and respective responsibilities, the Council of Europe member states should contribute to the creation of sustainable frameworks to enable greater quality of life in an inclusive society for ageing people with disabilities.

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Alyson Goldwater:
alyson.goldwater@newcastle.ac.uk

Prof Elaine Perry,
Dr. Elizabeta Mukaetova-Ladinska,
Michael Baron.

December 2009
The Council of Europe particularly recommends the following:

1. Living arrangements (at home, in supported accommodation or in residential placement) should take account of the individuals’ wishes and needs. Individuals’ personal potential and capabilities should always be included in holistic assessments of their needs and support requirements.

2. The principle of life-long learning should be applied, regardless of the age and abilities of individuals. Preparation for life changes should be included in programmes for ageing people with disabilities.

3. Ageing people with disabilities and older people with disabilities should be fully and directly involved throughout the process of designing, implementing and evaluating services. Families, care providers and friends should also be involved in these processes, as appropriate. So far as possible, services should be provided in a person’s home or community environment, rather than in a residential institution, and as close to a person’s home as possible.

4. The staff of support services should recognise both in their training and in carrying out their professional duties, the rights of those concerned to personal autonomy and choice over types, location, timing and pace of the services to be provided, when assistance with living is required. When care providers (family members, paid personal assistants) are involved, appropriate training, information and support should be provided by public authorities or NGOs.

5. Relatives that support a person with disabilities at home should receive material and other assistance. Regular periods of respite care should be available to provide family carers with a break from their responsibilities. This helps to ensure that home-based supported living can continue for as long as possible.

6. Eventually, services should be adequately financed as a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for them to be of satisfactory quality. Those responsible for funding should look to a variety of sources of financing, such as government funding, national and international NGOs, lotteries, contributions from business and contributions by service users themselves.

7. However, any charges to service users should be at an affordable level.

Evelyne Friedel

Bibliography

In July 2009, 19 persons with autism aged over 40 moved into “Sesame’s Village” in Saint-Sorlin in the Rhone region of France. This facility, which has been specifically conceived for ageing persons, will be set up permanently in Messimy (Rhone) in 2010. It will include 32 beds for permanent residents and 4 additional beds for temporary care.

Like other disabled people, persons with autism can expect to enjoy a longer life span than in the past. Adults with autism or PDD, currently aged 40+ did not benefit from adapted care for their specific needs during their childhood or adolescence and most of them were not helped to develop their skills. The degree of their dependency and the loss or ageing of their parents force them to live in institutions.

What kind of support should they enjoy in order to live the rest of their lives in the best possible conditions, which, at the same time, take into account their individual dependency needs?

Disabled from birth, persons with autism have always needed specific, personalised support. When they grow old, their disability changes and aged-related disorders are added to autism-related disorders.

Mainstream institutions for elderly people who have become dependent do not meet the necessary support conditions for persons with autism who have to cope with both disabilities: ageing and autism.

In France, a law of 2005 foresees that people living in nursing homes should be able to remain in the same facility when they are over 60 years of age.

The Sésame Autisme Rhône-Alpes Parents Association founded the first residential care facility specifically for adults with autism in the Rhone Region in 1987. We had to consider a suitable setting for ageing adults either by creating an internal “section” in the actual facility or by building a new unit devoted to ageing residents where they could stay for the rest of their lives. We chose the second option.

On the basis of our experience in support care for adults with autism living in institutions for more than 20 years, we have observed the following:

We need a life project adapted to the ageing person

The ageing adult’s predisposition to fatigue and medications that accentuate the effects of ageing means they are no longer compatible with any residential project globally conceived for young adults which is based on work-like activities and implies a dynamic pace of life such as any average active person might have (to get up early in the morning, be punctual and attentive during workshops, follow the pace of the group, etc).

Even though each resident’s personal project offers them individualized care, the physical condition of ageing adults no longer allows them to live with younger residents.

We must anticipate any urgencies due to the deterioration of a person’s health

Some adults now aged between 40 and 50 have already spend 20 years of their lives in the same institution, the same facility and in the company of the same residents. They have their “habits”. It is only possible for them to change their place of residence and get used to a new human environment without triggering too much anguish if the changes have been well prepared and if the person still has the capacity to adapt.

The possible worsening of their health and greater dependency needs could lead to a hurried and very destabilizing “move” but when they join this new facility they will find a pace of life that takes their growing difficulties into account and a medical staff able to take care of them even when their health deteriorates. No upper age limit is foreseen and they can remain here for the rest of their lives, with the only exception of particular cases that go beyond the limits of the facility’s possible support.

The familial environment of the person will encounter unavoidable changes

The familial environment of persons aged 40+ is often reduced to that of siblings due to the old age or the loss of one or both parents. Most residents can no longer return to their families. Sesame’s Village is a place where residents’ relatives can spend a day with them, share a meal with them in the living rooms specifically conceived for that purpose or go for a walk in the village (this is not automatically foreseen in other current institutions), etc.

“Sesame’s Village”: a place conceived in line with the Association’s philosophy

This setting will favour as harmonious a life as possible for the person in relation to him/herself and others.

Care for the person will concentrate in three areas:

A therapeutic function provided by a multi-disciplinary team in close liaison with hospital sector services for the medical check-ups of
adult residents. All body-care, which old age may make necessary, will be provided by specialized practitioners.

A support and motivational function for activities meant to maintain acquired skills, favour fulfilment and well-being, and preserve the person's capacities and cultural openness.

A social function: the unit will network with the three existing units of the Bellecombe Home (day care centre, nursing home, residential care home) and with nearby institutions taking care of the same kind of persons, as well as with social centres and homes for elderly people from neighbouring villages in such a way as to enhance the social inclusion of residents as much as possible.

An architectural project incorporated in our objectives

Situated in the centre of Messimy, “Sesame’s Village” will be composed of 5 buildings for a habitable surface area of 2 017 m²: one administrative staff building and four individual houses built on a 8000 m² lot with orchards and greenhouses for the cultivation of plants.

The four houses will each contain between 8 and 10 individual bedrooms of 20 m² with bathrooms en suite (sink, shower and toilet). They will also contain a kitchen for the preparation of breakfasts (cold meals are delivered), a dining room and a living room.

A little square with a covered market, kiosk and benches will give the whole structure the aspect of a real village, bearing in mind that each building will have a distinctive façade. The interiors, however, will be identical, with “colour” reference points and characteristic decoration.

A road will pass through this enclosed village with gates at each end which will be opened to the public on special occasions (markets, celebrations, cultural exhibitions, etc.).

The three features of care in Sesame’s Village:

1. The unit will be open permanently: this will be each adult’s main place of residence

2. Visits and stays with residents’ families will be maintained according to the possibilities and wishes of the residents and their families.

3. Temporary and respite care or urgent personalised care for adults coming from other settings, in a networking perspective and in response to transitory needs related to personal or familial situations.

The 36 places are divided as followed:

- 32 places for permanent care with individual rooms and private bathrooms

- 4 places for temporary care as an alternative to hospitalisation or living at home.

Sesame’s Village will open in Messin in September 2010 when the 19 people who have been living in Saint-Sorlin since July 2009 will move in their new place of residence.

A Tabet
Vice-présidente
Sesame Autisme Rhône-Alpes
Autism Connections Europe consortium’s objective is to provide adults (18 years old and more) with autism spectrum disorders with the opportunity to enhance their communication and social skills. To do so, they will be invited to participate in online communities, travel to other countries (Slovenia, Italy, Great Britain and Estonia). One of the objectives is also to empower them to advocate for their rights, and help them become active citizens.

About the project

Project ACE is managed by Center for Autism, Slovenia and includes the following partners: Autism-Europe, Estonian Autism Society, Oxford Brookes University, Agencija Imelda Ogilvy and Autism Romania. The project is supported by the Lifelong Learning Programme – Grundtvig subprogramme. Autism-Europe will be mainly involved in the dissemination of information.

Impact is expected on personal level (higher ICT competences, social and communication skills, independence, active citizenship), and on system level (awareness, acceptance, policy changes, EU methodology). The project began in November 2009 and will end in October 2011.

Activities scheduled

Adults with ASD will be invited to participate in the following activities:

- **ICT training workshops**, in which adults with ASD will learn how to use ICT, how to join and communicate in online communities, what are the hazards and risks of the internet, how to communicate safely online.

- **Participation in international congresses**, where adults with ASD will meet their colleagues from other countries, participate in social activities and present their problems and achievements to experts and public authorities. Before each international congress a preparation workshop will be organised, about the country of visit, its culture, language, climate, history, etc.

- **Publication of a web newspaper** after each international congress.

Expected benefits for participants

Participants will gain communication skills in the context of internet communication as well as real-life international communication. They will also be trained to use ICT. The process of development of virtual and real social interaction and communication will be documented in a scientific research. Guides with instructions on how to use ICT for communication, different web dangers, and alternatives to virtual communication will be presented in a booklet and in a movie. Participants will be able to influence on public policies.
DAVID AMARAL, Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, is the Director of Research, University of California at Davis M.I.N.D. Institute and President of INSAR (International Society for Autism Research). His interests include research on the neuroanatomical, behavioral and electrophysiological organization and functions of brain systems that are involved in learning, memory, emotion and social behavior. He also conducts research into the neurobiological underpinnings of autism spectrum disorders, ranging from longitudinal MRI studies of children with autism to evaluation of autoantibodies in these children and in their mothers, as well as in nonhuman primate models of autism.

SIMON BARON-COHEN, PhD, Professor of Developmental Psychopathology, Director of the Autism Research Centre (ARC) and CLAWS (Cambridge Lifespan Asperger Syndrome Service) in Cambridge, vice-president of INSAR, is author of several scientific publications, including Mind blindness (1995), and the DVD-ROM Mind Reading: an interactive guide to emotions (2003). He has been awarded from the American Psychological Association, the British Association for Science (BA), and the British Psychological Society (BPS). His current research is testing the ‘extreme male brain’ theory at the neural, endocrine and genetic levels.

THOMAS BOURGERON, M.D., is a geneticist and director of the Human Genetics and Cognitive Functions at the Department of Neuroscience at the Institute Pasteur in Paris. He identified several mutations associated with ASD in genes that impact the development of neurons and their ability to form synapses. Dr. Bourgeron is a member of the European Molecular Biology Organization and received several prestigious awards and honours, including the 2005 Young Investigator Award from the European Neuroscience Institute and the French Academy of Sciences’ award for Biological Discoveries of 2007. His research interests are focused on the genetic origin and evolution of human cognitive functions.

ERNESTO CAFFO, M.D., Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy, President and founder of SOS II Telefono Azzurro Onlus, President of the Foundation for Study and Research in Childhood and Adolescence, former President of ESCAP (European Society for Child and Adolescent Psychiatry) and current President of the European Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (EACAP), is the author of numerous scientific publications in the field of child psychiatry, developmental psychology, autism, traumas and abuse in childhood and adolescence.

ERIC FOMBONNE, M.D., is the Head of the Division of Child Psychiatry at McGill University and Director of the Department of Psychiatry at the Montreal Children’s Hospital. He is a leading authority on epidemiology of autism and on the putative links between autism and immunization. He has also been involved in family and genetic studies of autism, and in outcome studies. He has a long track record of scientific/research leadership including serving as a consultant for the National Academy of Sciences, the Centre for Diseases Control, the American Academy of Paediatrics, the MRC (UK), the MIND Institute (U.C. Davis).

EVELYNE FRIEDEL is a lawyer specialised in International and European law. She has been president of Autism Europe since 2008. She was the author of the Collective Complaint against France regarding the right to education of children and adults with ASD and represented before the European Committee of Social Rights of the Council of Europe.

JOAQUIN FUENTES-BIGGI, M.D., is a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist who specialised in ASD at the Albany Medical Centre Hospital, New York, and at the Western Psychiatric Institute & Clinic, University of Pittsburgh. He is the scientific responsible of the GAUTENA programme for ASD in the Gipuzkoa province, Spain, director of the Child Psychiatry, Policlínica Gipuzkoa, coordinator of several research programmes in the field of ASD, and author of the manual Pharmacautism. He is member of the Executive Committee of IACAPAP and co-ordinator of the working group on ASD of the Instituto Nacional de Salud Carlos III, Madrid.

PATRICIA HOWLIN, PhD, Professor of Clinical Psychology at St George’s University of London, is Consultant Chartered Clinical Psychologist and Fellow of the British Psychological Society. Her interests include research on the effectiveness of interventions for ASD, evaluation of different intervention programmes, including comparative studies of home and school based treatments; a randomized control trial of the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), long term studies of the impact of early interventions, and the impact of employment programmes for high functioning individuals with autism/Asperger syndrome.

AMI KLIN, PhD, Harris Professor of Child Psychology and Psychiatry is the director of the Yale Child Study Centre’s Autism Program, which is committed to research, training and to providing comprehensive clinical services to children with autism spectrum disorders and their families. The program is also advocacy. His current research focuses on mechanisms of socialization and their disruption in the autism spectrum disorders, including the development of novel techniques to quantify social processes using eye-tracking technologies. He and colleagues are monitoring babies at risk for autism for indications of vulnerabilities for autism in early infancy.

CATHERINE LORD, PhD, professor of psychology, psychiatry and paediatrics, Director of the Autism and Communication Disorders Centre (UMACC), University of Michigan, providing clinical evaluations, consultations and training in the field of diagnosis of ASD, she was involved in developing the gold standard diagnostic instruments ADOS and ADI-R. Her current projects include the development of a toddler module for the ADOS, a repository of cell lines and
phenotypic data for families with a child with autism and a typical child, the development of a measure of language in children with ASD, studies of different interventions with very young children and a longitudinal study of children followed from age 2 who are now in their teens.

NANCY MINSHEW, M.D., Professor of Psychiatry and Neurology at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, Director of the University of Pittsburgh based Collaborative Programs of Excellence in Autism (CPEA), is an internationally recognized expert in autism. Dr. Minshew is collaborating with a team of scientists from Carnegie Mellon University and University of Illinois at Chicago to find the neurological, genetic, and cognitive basis for autism. Her research has completed large-scale neuropsychologic studies, eye movement and posturography studies, structural MRI, and MRS (magnetic resonance spectroscopy) of high functioning autistic individuals, resulted in evidence of a neocortical systems as the primary site of CNS dysfunction.

VINCENZO PAPA, M.D., is president of the parents association “Un futuro per l’autismo”, Catania, which has supported for many years families of persons with ASD by organising conferences, training for teachers, social workers and health professionals and respite services for persons with ASD. He is member of the Board of Directors of Autismo Italia, and represents Autismo Italia within the Scientific Programme Committee of the IX International Congress of Autism-Europe.

GIACOMO RIZZOLATI, M.D., Full Professor and Director of the Department of Human Physiology, University of Parma, is Associate Member of the Neuroscience Program, San Diego, member of «Accademia dei Lincei», «Academia Europaea», of «Academia dei Lincei», «Honorary Foreign Member» of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and “Associé étranger” of the Académie des sciences, France. The main focus of his research concerns the motor system and its role in cognitive functions. In the last years he was mostly involved in studies of the mirror neuron system. His experimental approach consists of recording the activity of single neurons in non human primates and of brain imaging in humans.

SALLY J. ROGERS, PhD, Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at UC Davis M.I.N.D. Institute, Sacramento, specializes in conducting research into early social, cognitive, and emotional development, communication, imitation and social relationships in people with developmental disorders, and treatment efficacy in autism. Her clinical interests include early diagnosis and intervention for children with autism spectrum disorders, and evaluation of cognitive, behavioral, social, emotional, and adaptive functioning in children with other developmental disorders. She has written extensively in her field, authoring numerous articles and books and developing training videos on child development.

SEBASTIANO RUSSO, M.D., Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, director of Child Psychiatry, Ospedale Marta Santa Venera, Acireale, which has been collaborating for many years with the local parents association in developing comprehensive care programmes for children with ASD. He is vice-president of SINPIA and was member of the working group on ASD, Ministry of Health, in 2007-2008.

SIR MICHAEL RUTTER has been described as the ‘father of child psychology’. Currently he is Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at the Institute of Psychiatry, King’s College, London, since 1966. In 1984 he set up the Medical Research Council (UK) Child Psychiatry Research Unit and the Social, Genetic and Developmental Psychiatry Centre in 1994. His work includes studies in the field of autism including links between research and practice, genetic and epidemiologic studies, biological and social factors. He is also recognized as contributing centrally to the establishment of child psychiatry as a medical and biopsychosocial specialty with a solid scientific base.

RENA  SCIFO, MD, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, coordinates the programme for ASD of the Child Psychiatry, at the Hospital Marta Santa Venera, Acireale. He is responsible for a programme providing support to mainstream schools for the inclusion and special education of children with ASD, in collaboration with the local parents association.

RUTGER JAN VAN DER GAAG, M.D., is a child and youth psychiatrist who conducts research in the field of developmental psychopathology. Early detection of and intervention in autistic spectrum disorders, treatment of ADHD, neuropsychological interactions in developmental disorders, recognition of autism spectrum disorders in adults and double diagnoses (addiction and psychopathology in young people) are some of the projects that is currently involved in. Van der Gaag’s department is working on a dataset of the results of all children and adolescents that have been clinically studied by Stichting Kinder- & Jeugdpsychiatrie Oost-Nederland (Child and Youth Psychiatry East Netherlands).

FRED R. VOLKMAR, M.D., professor of psychiatry, paediatrics and psychology, director of the Child Study Centre (CSC), Yale University, and chief of the Department of Child Psychiatry at Yale-New Haven Hospital, is a world authority in the diagnosis and treatment of autism. At the CSC, Volkmar directs an autism clinic that conducts cutting-edge research on the basic biology of autism and its diagnosis and treatment. An editor of the Handbook of Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders, Volkmar was the primary author of the autism section in the latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the standard guide to psychiatric diagnosis.
**TOUCHES OF AUTISM**

5th INTERNATIONAL ART EXHIBITION OF PEOPLE WITH AUTISM

Since 1997 Autismo Burgos has organized the International Art Exhibitions of People with Autism, whose aim is stimulating creativity and artistic expression among people with autism.

**Participation rules:**
Works must be original and unpublished. They can be: paintings, photos, etc. The number of works is limited to one piece per participant.

- Measures: pictures’ measures must range from 50 to 80 cm. (frame included)

Participants will send work properly framed, without glass, and packed. Organizers won’t frame works.

The name of the artist and return address must be written on the back of the work. It is advisable to send one photo of the work with the name of the artist on the back.

- Since collecting funds is not the aim of the Exhibition, the sale of work is not allowed during the time of the Exhibition.
- The artists allow the organizers to mention freely their names, as well as to publish their work in catalogues or any other format that the organizers may decide.
- The Exhibition will take place at the Congress Venue, whose capacity is limited. If necessary, a selection of works may be done by a panel of impartial people related to autism and arts.
- During the opening act the 3 awards ARTISMODS 2010 will be announced and the winner artist’s work will illustrate the announcing poster for the 6th edition. The Organisers will give a certificate of participation to the artists. There also will be a PRICE FROM THE PUBLIC attending the exhibition.
- The organisation will not cover cost for sending or returning works to participants. The organizers can take no responsibility for loss or damage to your work.

The address of Autismo Burgos is:  
C/ Valdenúñez, 8  
09001 - Burgos - Spain  
Fax: 34-947-461245  
Phone: 34-947-461243  
E-Mail: fernando@autismoburgos.org

This form is also available at: www.autismoburgos.org

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**Participation Data**

[Each participant or Association/Organization must send this form directly to Autismo Burgos Association]

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Association/Organization: (If participant attends any Organisation or Centre, it is enough to mention the data relating Organisation or Centre, no personal data are required)

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<td>Measurements of the work:</td>
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<td>Brief biography of the author:</td>
<td>Person to contact:</td>
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(Please, don’t forget to enclose a photo of the work with the name of artist on the back as soon as possible.)

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INVITATION
TO AUTISM-EUROPE’s
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Kassel - Germany
5 June 2010

In accordance with the statutes of our organization, we are
pleased to invite you to attend the Autism Europe Annual General
Assembly, which will take place in Kassel, on Saturday 5 June
2010, in the afternoon, from 14.00-18.00:

• Presentation
  of the executive committee report

• Presentation
  of the Activity Report : 2009

• Presentation
  of the financial report:  2009

• Presentation
  of the Work Programme 2010

• Election
  of Administrators

All the working documents related to the General Assembly will be
e-mailed later to the registered participants.

Gala Diner :
Saturday June 5th 2010 – 20h00
Please note that the AE Council of Administration meeting will also
take place, in the morning, on Saturday June 5th 2010 and Sunday
6th June 2010. A visit of the Art Exhibition is also scheduled on
Friday 4th June 2010.

For more information, please contact Autism-Europe secretariat:
secretariat@autismeuropa.org.

EXHIBITION
« I spy with my little eye … »
May 29th to June 20th 2010 Kassel (Germany)

At the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of Autism Germany, from May 29th to June 20th 2010, Autismus Deutschland e.V. will
present the art exhibition “I spy with my little eye …” of autistic artists in the documenta-
Halle in Kassel, well-known for hosting the international art-event Documenta.

More than 180 artists submitted their artworks including painting, sculpture, photography, video and installation to a jury. Among them
such well-known artists as Konrad H. Giebeler, as well as the Hamburg-based art group “Die Schlumper” or Adolf Beutler, who received the
3rd place prize in the first EUWARD contest (European Award Painting and Graphic Art by Artists with Mental Disability 2000).

The initiative AKKU is very proud to announce Jan Hoet, international curator (Documenta IX)
and founding director of the museum MARTa in Herford, as ambassador of the initiative. He
was deeply impressed by the quality and variety of the artworks. Jan Hoet will support the
show, with his knowledge and network.

The interest in the show and the initiative AKKU in Germany is enormous. We will represent the initiative at the big “Encounters Day (Integration through Culture)” which takes place under the auspices of Ruhr.2010 on June 27th. AKKU
is also in discussion with several museums in Germany which are very interested in further
showings of the exhibition.

We will be very delighted to welcome you next summer in Kassel.

Maria Kaminski (president)
Katharina Dietz (project management)
Who doesn't just love travelling? Getting out of the daily routine to explore distant places, to experience something new, exciting, or even inspirational. The fact that people with Autism also enjoy travelling is shown by many reports that arrive at the editorial office of our newsletter "Autismus". They also report of the big and little problems a tourist with Autism can encounter. And so we had the idea of organizing our own special expedition.

No sooner said than done. We found the destination during a visit to Dresden. The trip should go to Swiss Saxony and, of course, to Dresden. I recorded some spontaneous ideas for the expedition quickly so as not to forget them, and so things took form. We eventually found suitable accommodation in the St. Ursula Catholic family inn in Naundorf close to the town of Wehlen. Having the right travel companions is also important, and for this expedition they were our President, Mrs. Maria Kaminski, Mr. Frese, and I.

As the plan needed to be as tailored to the participants as possible, detailed planning did need a bit more effort. This included several meetings and visits to the area. So many questions needed to be considered: Art museum or Grünes Gewölbe (Green Vault)? Or neither, as they are too stressful? Where can you ramble safely, whilst still being in the middle of mountainous countryside? How much time would be needed? Will all arrangements work out? Will it all come together in the end? This was an exciting matter for me, since I’m just a volunteer tour guide.

And then, the time had come. Armed with a large Autism logo, I waited for the group at Dresden’s main train station. From there, we proceeded with people and baggage in a 2 car convoy, and already I started to feel some pressure. My passengers, 3 young men with ASD, quickly entangled me in difficult discussions, right in the middle of the heavy city traffic! Relaxation at our arrival was assured, as we are greeted with coffee and cake. A short walk followed, which allowed us a first look at the picturesque Elbe valley.

Swiss Saxony stretches south east from Dresden. It caters well for tourists and is famous for its impressive sandstone formations. The best way to get to know them is to ramble through them. Narrow gorges bordered by stark boulders give way to fields, forests, soft valley and the Table Mountains typical to the area.

Our first leg saw us climbing the Lilienstein (Lily Stone). It towers 200 meters over the Elbe valley. The labored climb was, however, quickly forgotten as we admired the amazing view and enjoyed the tasty food at the peak’s restaurant. The courageous ones then proceeded to
climb out to the rocks at the edge of the Lilienstein using dangerous looking, but well secured, metal ladders and walkways. From there they could enjoy the view of the sheer rock face dropping away into the valley. The remainder of us watched from a safe distance.

The following days were also filled with new experiences. In Dresden we visited the historic city panorama where you can discover lots of interesting details. Of course we also had a visit to the city centre and the Frauenkirche. We finished the day with lunch together at the Autism therapy center followed by Königstein Castle. This is a must for all visitors, with lots of canons, trenches, thick walls and the history of the discovery of Meißen porcelain.

Evenings also had plenty to do. The common room at the hostel had table tennis, billiards, a piano, a small library and a large collection of board games. We played our way through all of them, and enjoyed the feeling of being returned to our childhood. Fun was indeed had by all.

Of course our group was quite noticeable in public, and everyone enjoyed the companionship of being part of it. Of course there were the occasional strange look from others, but we always dealt with that with cheerful aplomb. Everyone could be themselves, and the small problems that occurred were overcome with gentle support.

Our last trip took us back to the centre of the national park. An experienced climber (and professional therapist) guided us along narrow paths right through the middle of the rock formations, carved into interesting shapes by the elements. Unfortunately the weather was not as kind to us for this last trip.

After that, we were back to the hostel to pack our cases. One of the group, Stefan Weingarten, summed up his experiences in the following words “This week feels as if much more time has passed than really has. We have experienced so much. We got to know one another, and have become close. It was wonderful.” Thank you Stefan!

And it doesn’t stop there. The next group has just returned from the Black Forest. What’s next? – Prague? Or maybe the Alps? Or what about Rome?

Bettina Bönsch
Paediatricians from the French-speaking Group of Gastroenterology have recently been alerted to the increasing number of families using or willing to use gluten-free and casein-free diets (GF/CF diets) for children presenting Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Further to the paediatricians’ request, the French Agency for Food Safety (AFSSA) decided to assess the efficacy and safety of GF/CF diets. AFSSA is an independent public agency contributing to the protection and improvement of public health through monitoring, alerts, research and research initiatives. The Agency is responsible for operational assignments including health and nutrition risk and benefit assessment.

AFSSA has published a report on the “Efficacy and safety of gluten-free and casein-free diets proposed in children presenting pervasive developmental disorders (autism and related syndromes)” (1). GF/CF diets have, in fact, become an alternative form of intervention for autism over the years.

Based on the knowledge that GF/CF diets represent a risk for a child’s nutritional state and growth, this report initially focussed on researching and evaluating reliable scientific data to assess their efficacy. Extended bibliographic research was undertaken in order to assess the impact of GF/CF diets and the effects of more gluten and/or casein on self-expression skills, verbal and cognitive functions, and motor and behavioural skills in children and adolescents presenting ASD.

It was acknowledged that GF/CF diets limit the diffusion of neuromediators affecting the brain. It was suggested that autism may be associated with digestive disorders or intestinal permeability allowing the passage of derived opioid peptides generated by the enzymatic digestion of milk and cereals. These opioid peptides would then reach the central nervous system and affect brain functioning.

The report underlines that, according to current scientific knowledge, to avoid all proteins that might generate derived opioid peptides would mean the exclusion of practically all food products. Moreover, the most recent biochemical methods do not permit the detection of opioid peptides in the urine of autistic subjects (2).

In the second part of the report and always on the basis of scientific literature, the investigators studied the potential links between ASD and chronic inflammatory diseases of the digestive tract. Although no data can confirm that the prevalence of digestive disorders in children with ASD is higher than in the rest of the population, the report recommends research into these disorders as they may cause behaviour modifications, particularly in children who cannot express pain verbally.

Finally, the investigators tried to assess the safety of GF/CF diets which, in all cases, represent a risk for a child’s nutritional state and growth. According to the report, there is no scientific data that allows conclusions to be drawn either on the benefits or the risks of these diets. Nevertheless, such treatments should only be carried out under the strict supervision of qualified nutritionists.

The conclusions of this report concord with the official Autism-Europe document entitled: “Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Identification, Understanding, Intervention” as well as with numerous articles and guides to good practice.


Michel FAVRE
Autism spectrum disorders in a business context

The autism community and the business community have been separate entities for a long time. But it does not have to be so.

In 2008 the IT Prize Denmark was given by the Danish IT Industry Association to the company SPECIALISTERNE. The unusual circumstance is that the majority of the employees in SPECIALISTERNE have Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). The prize is the proof of acceptance of people with ASD competing at market terms in the Danish IT business.

The consultants of SPECIALISTERNE have ASD and solve tasks like software testing, quality control, data entries, packing/shipping, programming and monitoring for large Danish and international companies. The company is a case study at Harvard Business School and I was interviewed by Harvard Business Review to discuss what the traditional business can learn from managing people with ASD.

With SPECIALISTERNE we have opened the door to the business community for people with ASD.

We have a proven track record in Denmark of demonstrating that behind the disability you can assess special abilities which are potentially very valuable in the business sector and can be harnessed to meet and exceed the needs for special skills in the market.

A year ago SPECIALISTERNE was handed over to Specialist People Foundation - a not for profit organization with the purpose of disseminating the knowhow from SPECIALISTERNE internationally. The first international SPECIALISTERNE franchise will be established in Glasgow, Scotland, in 2010. The vision is to make societies respect and embrace people with ASD as valuable and worthy citizens. To fulfil the vision, we intend to establish SPECIALISTERNE showcases globally and to enable and certify large companies in the business sector to hire and manage people with ASD and similar challenges (i.e. ADHD).

We are convinced that the SPECIALISTERNE concept will work in other countries in Europe. With the support of the autism communities and the business communities we can transfer the model to the different states and provide meaningful and productive jobs for a large number of people with ASD in Europe.

Best,
Thorkil Sonne
Founder of SPECIALISTERNE and Specialist People Foundation
www.specialisterne.com
Autism-Europe Symposium at the Pasteur Institute, Paris

On 16 July 2009 an international symposium « Anticipating a Future for Autism » was held at the Pasteur Institute, Paris. The meeting was organised by Autism-Europe with the help of the French parents association Pro Aid Autisme and funded by the Fondation Orange and the Pasteur Institute. The symposium was an initiative of Dr. Thomas Bourgeron and Dr. Joaquin Fuentes on the occasion of the visit to Paris of Professor Robert Hendren of the M.I.N.D. Institute, President of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Even though the meeting took place in the summer holiday period, more than 300 parents and professionals as well as a delegation of approximately 30 Americans participated and contributed to the success of the meeting. The day began with the American delegates’ visit to the museum and apartments of Louis Pasteur. The main objective of the symposium was to provide information and offer a range of national and international perspectives towards a better understanding of autism and the realisation of care and support methods and programmes for persons with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

The symposium opened with a communication by Professor Catherine Barthélémy (University Centre of Child Psychiatry, Tours), who presented the Autism-Europe official document “Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Identification, Understanding, Intervention” of which she is co-author with Dr. Joaquin Fuentes, among others. She then presented a document published by the French Agency for Food Safety (AFSSA) entitled “Efficacy and safety of gluten-free and casein-free diets proposed in children presenting pervasive developmental disorders [autism and related syndromes]” (1). She ended her talk with the presentation of the Autism Plan 2008-2010 that is ongoing in France and announced the publication of a report at the end of 2009 on the situation of current knowledge concerning autism.

For his part, Professor Thomas Bourgeron (Denis Diderot University, Paris VII) spoke about the state of our knowledge of the genetic component in autism. He highlighted the latest findings which point to mutations in certain proteins (Neuroligins, Shank 3, connexins …) that have the function of maintaining good cohesion at a level of the synapses which guarantee signalling between brain neurons. He then explained how, with the latest technology, it is possible to reveal chromosome abnormalities in persons with autism. These rearrangements are under investigation in a number of international laboratories which would point to early diagnosis and greater understanding of ASD in the medium term. Prof. Bourgeron also underlined the beneficial effect that treatment with melatonin can have on the care and daily lives of persons with ASD and their families.

Professor Robert Hendren is head of the M.I.N.D. Institute (Medical Investigation of Neurodevelopmental Disorders, Sacramento, California), an international multidisciplinary research organisation that has the objective of investigating the causes of neurodevelopmental disorders and developing appropriate treatments. He presented some of the significant research projects that his institute is involved in and, in particular, the “Autism Phoneme Project” (APP), which aims to distinguish among recognised subgroups or phenotypes of autism characterised by their distinct patterns of behaviour and biological changes. He also spoke with some caution - given the lack of conclusive scientific evidence - of the state of our understanding of the role of environmental factors in the incidence of ASD.

Dr. Joaquin Fuentes (Gipuzkoa Out-patients Clinic, Gauñena, San Sebastian, Spain) also spoke about the Autism-Europe official document and cited the various good practice guides and recommendations available in the world and in Spain (2). All these guidelines converge on the usefulness of setting up adequate educational methods and programmes, adapted to the individual needs of each person with autism. He spoke of the methods that should be banned, the treatments for which no conclusions can be made due to insufficient evidence and the effective approaches that can be recommended and applied in the field of ASD. Moreover, he presented the system of care employed in the Basque Province, whatever the age of the person with ASD. Despite the cost that this system of care represents, it is evident that education, autonomy and inclusion in society constitute the corner stones of the system set up in Spain.

The symposium concluded with an animated discussion lasting 1h30 during which the French and English participants posed numerous questions and provided examples of the situation in the USA and in France. We hope that the meeting organised at the Pasteur institute will be held again in the future and that this symposium has given a new perspective to parents and professionals alike on the best conditions which are available outside France for the care of persons with ASD.

Michel Favre

- These two documents are available in English and French on the websites of www.autismeurope.org or www.proaidautisme.org
- These guides to good practice are available at the web address: http://iier.isciii.es/autismo
Autism, Current and Future Prospects – towards good practices for all

Arapí’s 10th Autumn University, 6-10 October 2009

This vast topic included scientific practice, approaches to care, their development, efficiency and validity as well as early detection, genetic diagnosis and the use of medications. Over the four days of the Autumn University these subjects were dealt with in plenary conferences, workshops and poster sessions by numerous researchers and clinical specialists.

Here are some of the 4-day highlights:

Bruno Falissard (Child Psychiatrist, France) and Nadia Chabane (Child Psychiatrist, France) underlined the need to refer to a rigorous methodology, like the one used in somatic medicine, in order to assess different interventions in persons with autism. However, current methods, which integrate quantitative and qualitative assessments, often come up against autistic peculiarities. This makes the interpretation of output more difficult since it is based on standard instruments more or less adapted to this pathology. Taking into account the new hypotheses in the field of PDD, Nadia Chabane suggested we rethink evaluation strategies in order to obtain more individualized measures and implement paradigms integrating “the notion of interpretative bias”

With a touch of humor, Erice Willaye (Psychologist, Belgium) assessed the difficulties observable in many services in applying good practices or, in other words, in implementing educational strategies corresponding to the specific needs of people with autism. He attempted to identify what is hindering their on-site implementation. Apparently, it is not due to a lack of professional training or to any financial problems but to the professionals’ fear of change.

Introduced by Mônica Zilbovicius, Ami Klin (Psychologist, USA) dealt with eye gaze studies using the eye-tracking technique. This non-invasive technique makes it possible to localize and follow someone’s eye gaze with great precision. Impairments in social engagement are already noticeable in autistic infants who are being talked to since they mainly fix their eyes on the physical aspects of their environment (such as the mouth) and not on those aspects expressing emotions (such as the eyes) like ordinary infants do. These studies show the tendency of autistic infants to focus on physical and material aspects rather than social ones from an early age onwards. Given the plasticity of the brain, research should focus on therapeutic interventions that could modify social engagement strategies as soon as autism is detected.

Vittorio Gallese (Neurologist, Italy) has studied the role of mirror neurons on social interactions in order to understand someone else’s actions and intentions. Mirror neurons also play a role in imitation skills and in the brain’s planning of daily gestures, and are necessary for their execution. Referring to the results, in a distant future we could possibly consider reorganizing the brain to partly compensate for the deficit functions. Even though studies on mirror neurons open new fields of investigation for a better understanding of autistic disorders we should be very cautious as these hypotheses have only been tested on primates to date.

Other current studies on eye gaze orientation and pupillary dilatation show dilatation differences between autistic children and children presenting no behavior disorders when watching someone else’s social behaviors. This specific aspect could lead to early intervention on social symptoms. These research data are based on the hypothesis according to which a dysfunctional mirror-neuron system is a causal factor in PDD (Terje Falck-Ytter, Psychologist, Sweden)

Jacqueline Nadel (Psychologist, France) presented research work on the imitation of actions as a means of non-verbal communication and on the ability to establish a link between perception and action generation. She suggested that the MNS (Mirror-Neuron System) may be responsible for connecting the emission and reception of a message, which could mean that the MNS plays a key role in social interaction. By referring to video tapes of spontaneous imitation, Jacqueline Nadel showed that autistic children with no verbal language also have this communication skill, which could be used to develop other means of communication.

As a partnership association between professionals and parents, ARAPI allocated speaking time to different organizations: UNAPEI, Autisme France, Sésame Autisme, Sated and Autism-Europe. Representing Autism-Europe, my talk dealt with “The Rights of Persons with Autism”. I denounced, with examples, the discrimination these persons are still victims of in most European countries.

Not only were these 4 days highly informative but they were also the opportunity for professionals and parents to exchange informal information, to establish and reinforce contacts, and to plan visits or make exchange projects. In France, the Autumn University remains the principal occasion for reviewing breakthroughs in research and innovative interventions in the field of ASD.

Rita Thomassin
V^e Esposizione Internazionale d’Arte per Persone con Autismo “Tocchi di autismo”
Catania, 8-10 ottobre 2010
IX^e Congresso Internazionale Autismo Europa

5ème Exposition Internationale d’art des Personnes avec Autisme “Touches de l’autisme”
Catane, 8-10 octobre 2010
IX^e Congrès International Autisme Europe

V International Art Exhibition of People with Autism “Touches of Autism”
Catania, 8-10 October 2010
IX International Conference Autism Europe

Deadline to send participation form: 15th February 2010
Deadline to send works to Autismo Burgos: 4th May 2010

More information:
www.autismoburgos.org
www.autismoeurope.org

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