



AUT-2 HEAR

News from the team at Autism South Africa

New Beginnings

'It's never too late for a new beginning in your life'

This newsletter issue welcomes the ideas and the transitions we all need to make to get to a new start. A new approach mentally, physically and emotionally. The past year has been all about the pandemic.

It is time to move forward within the "new normal" and be practical about our futures. Be brave to get out there and live your life. Workplaces and communal places like malls and restaurants, government institutions and buildings should have policies and protocols in place to keep us safe from infection.



by Christine Evangelou
(from the book:
A Shore of Spiritual Shells)

"I hope you learn to love yourself,
Through a Godly storm, through the shimmers of love
That kissed your crown as you were born.
I hope you learn to love, Everything that makes you
whole,
The trickles of pain, That still echo through your veins,
And the purpose that kept you going,
Rebuilding you, time, and time again.
I hope you learn to love, the truth of all you are,
Whether others accept it, Or fear it from afar.
I hope you learn to love, Everything that makes you,
you,
Without diluting your presence, Or losing your voice,
Just to please others,
As you walk so gently through.
I hope you learn to love, Your fearless, fiery side,
The one that speaks so honestly
Without worry of reprise.
I hope you live a life, that you so wonderfully
deserve,
And that you bravely reinvent yourself,
As often as your soul thunders and stirs.
I hope that you learn to love, each finality and
closed door,
So you can find a new beginning, In sparkly showers
of hope
As your wings electrify, taking flight to soar"

Wellbeing during a pandemic

Here are five tips for protecting your physical and mental health over this time:

1. **Take a break** from social media and try not to watch too much news
2. **Be compassionate** towards others by helping people around you, offer reassurance and emotional support
3. **Try to keep to your daily routines** as much as possible
4. **Keep healthy habits** such as getting enough sleep, regular exercise and a healthy diet
5. **Social distancing** does not mean social isolation, reconnect with your friends and family – safely!

Please do enjoy reading further and if you have any comments or queries you may email info@autismsouthafrica.org





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Juliet Carter
National Director

What just happened?

A year ago, we were in my office having an emergency meeting on how Autism SA was going to navigate through the impending lockdown. We had to make many decisions that morning, with no warning. It all felt so surreal, like watching one of those terrible doomsday movies. We thought – hoped actually – that it would all blow over and life, as we knew it, would soon return to 'normal. It didn't! Little did we know that we would still be in some form of lockdown a year later. So, what happened in a year?

Covid-19 as at **16 March 2020**: Worldwide 7, 227 people had died, and 235, 472 people were infected. In South Africa no-one had died, and we had 64 cases. One year later, **16 March 2021**: Over 2,6 million people have died. Over 12 million people have been infected. In South Africa over 1 million people have been infected, and over 50 000 people have died. This is overwhelming. Each number represents a person, who had a family; a life. How do we deal with the staggering numbers

and the lasting impacts of this pandemic? I have noticed something that worries me. Many people have lost more than one colleague, loved one, friend and/or family member to Covid-19. They learn of someone's death, feel gutted, cry a little, then shove all of that emotion into a 'glass bottle', shove a cork into the bottle, which gets shoved into a 'backpack' – to deal with later. Because, tomorrow someone else has died, and another bottle gets shoved into the backpack. Because, they still have to do life, and if they have to fully embrace all of that grief, all at once, they may not cope with the deluge of emotions. So, the backpack gets filled with glass bottles, that we all know will have to be opened one day. Then what?

Many people have spoken about the second pandemic, a mental health pandemic. Are we prepared for that? The healthcare and social service professionals in the mental health sector are going to be flooded with people who require their services. But, what can we do now? We can all be a lot kinder to one another, for starters. We can practise empathy. We can listen when someone needs to talk. We can be more patient. We can simply be there for another person. In our sector, we have to think about how we can assist those who suddenly find themselves in the muck and mire of a messy life, grappling with unresolved grief.

What about communal/collective grief? Those who have been around since the HIV and AIDS

pandemic in the early nineties (before antiretrovirals were available) will remember our concerns about the impact of compassion fatigue at a community level.

I am putting the challenge out there. The families, individuals and professionals with whom we work already have so much to deal with and think of regarding autism. Add to the mix, financial stress, unemployment, and now this 'bottled grief'. How do we support our families, individuals and professionals through this process? I certainly don't have the answers to this question – yet. And I say yet, because I am always hopeful, that as we were able to adjust to life in a pandemic, with great agility, we will – as a collective – find a way to navigate through the next (possible) pandemic.

I read this little gem today: "*Grief brings sorrow, but it also brings gifts. We can find out something about our inner sense of strength that we didn't know we had, or gain resources we didn't know we had access to before. As we look at what we've lost, at the same time we can try to identify, 'Are there things that we have actually gained? Are there ways in which we've actually grown...grief is a spectrum, and so is hope.*" (See: <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/22262549/grief-anxiety-coronavirus-covid-19-resilience-stress>).

I am hopeful!





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Kaylene Christensen
Head Office

New "Kid" on the Block; very eager and very passionate

(We would like to introduce you to Kaylene. She joined Autism SA last year already, as a volunteer. She was officially appointed as our National Education Facilitator on 1 February 2021.)

I started working in special needs education while living in Vietnam 5 years ago. It was there where I met a little boy who changed my life forever. My interest in autism grew and I made a conscious decision to become the best teacher, advocate, and friend that I could be. After 2 years in Vietnam, I moved back to South Africa to teach and have been volunteering with Autism South Africa in my spare time.

I have been fortunate enough to meet and work with professionals from around the world,

but my greatest fortune has been to meet autistic adults who have shown and taught me more than any book ever could. Insight from autistic adults is the best opportunity we have to ensure that autistic children can learn and experience life in a way that is suited to them, rather than suited to society. I am married and my husband and I love running, cycling and being outdoors."

I find it quite fitting that the theme for this month's newsletter is "New Beginnings" as I embark on this new beginning at Autism South Africa. As with many new beginnings, my journey so far, has been filled with excitement, enthusiasm and delight. However, as with many new beginnings, there have also been feelings of nervousness.

Joining A;SA has meant that I was welcomed into a team and a family that has been supportive, kind and loving.

As individuals they embody the values, beliefs and goals that A;SA as an organisation hold dear and I have never felt more at home or more grateful for the beginning of something new.

As my journey begins, I hope to continue to help A;SA reach more people, more families and more communities. To inspire, uplift and continue creating a change within our country so that Autism South Africa's goal of accepting, empowering, including and supporting becomes a reality for all autistic people.

To Vicky, you have left incredibly large shoes to fill. As you embark on your own new beginning, I would like to say thank you, for what you have done for A;SA and the autistic community. Good luck for all that lies ahead for you and lastly go well, knowing that you will always have a home with A;SA.





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Elfreda Baartman
Northern Cape

Back to schools, Back to work, Back to Life

We are on the brink of a new year. Kids are back at school, some people started new jobs, new babies were born, some started university or college and some even started a new career.

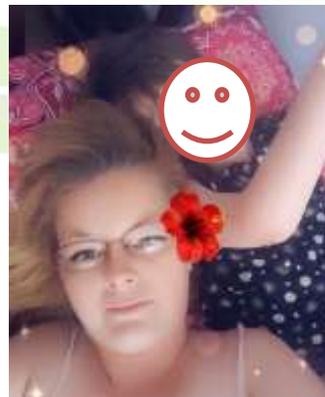
New beginnings may just be the start of something exciting and life changing. We at Autism South Africa are also looking forward to start this New Year with you. We hope for the best this year as 2020 had its own unique challenges. We hope to serve the community better, helping parents and children to the best of our abilities. We are striving to leave no child behind. We accept, include, empower and support.

New beginnings also come with new hope, new faith, new strategies and new beliefs that this year will be much better. With new

beginnings we must also have the right attitude of wanting to learn new things. We must remain teachable, open and transparent.

With all that being said, I am so happy to announce that we can do our Introduction to Autism workshops via Zoom now. Hands on Autism is also still available online. We still do face to face training, with all safety precautions and Covid -19 protocols observed at all times.

The following story is a true story of a little girl with the name of *Nikkie (not her real name). Unfortunately, Nikkie did not have a new beginning this year. I met Nikkie and her mom, Cindy when Nikkie took a pair of scissors and cut off her hair.



Nikkie was about 5 or 6 years old at the time. She was diagnosed as autistic, and she is also non-speaking. Her mom followed all the steps to get her assessed and in school.

She turned 10 years old this year, and she is still waiting to get into a school.

Her mom has been sent from pillar to post. Cindy really thought that her daughter would start this year, but again, Nikkie did not start. I personally called the Department of Basic Education's Inclusive Unit to enquire. I was sent to the District Education as it handles all placements.

The parent and I now need to fight for this little girl to get into school. I will do my best to see that she doesn't fall through the cracks like many others have. I will keep you informed how we progress as this represents so many other children who have not been supported to find a suitable school. Let us not keep quiet or stand back. All children have the right to an education.

Well peeps, I don't want to end off my letter in such a low tone, so let me lift your spirit with a little humour.

In the Baartman house, my first-born Abby was diagnosed as autistic when she was 3 years old. She takes everything literally and most of the time she teaches us to speak properly and to say what we mean.



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I can recall a time when I asked my child to “pull the chain” after she had been to the bathroom. Abby then walked over to the bath tub and pulled on the “plug” chain.

I immediately realized my mistake and had to correct myself and said, Abby ‘flush the toilet’. It was humorous, and also a learning curve for me to ‘say what I mean and mean what I say’. So now I always think before I speak. Thank you, Abby for that teaching moment!

So, let us keep learning as we start our new beginning.

Toodles!



Post Script:

Today on the 6th March 2021, I received the best news ever. Nikkie will start school on 9 March 2021. She will finally have her new beginning. I am sooo excited I almost started crying myself. I called the mom and she said that she got the news but she was not sure if it is only an assessment. I said no mommy; your child is starting school. Wow I am over the moon. I think the mom is still in shock. Let us never stop fighting for those who can't fight for themselves. Let's do this, touching and changing lives, one starfish at a time.



Antoinette Bruce-Alexander
Eastern Cape

Almost as normal; just safer!



Hello from a hot and humid Eastern Cape.

I hope everyone had a very good holiday with lots of bright smiles and fun. Over the past few months, we have seen a slowing down of activities for everyone, a wrapping up of 2020 and a hope for a better and brighter 2021.

A few new diagnoses of children were made and the parents came for counselling. Some of

it was face to face, observing all the Covid-19 protocols behind a clear perspex screen, screening forms filled out and sanitiser used to protect ourselves from the virus. Some meetings were done via zoom or WhatsApp video calling. I really love the fact that we are never too old to learn new skills.

A debate arose about the opening of schools and the safety of our children. Some parents firmly believe that schools should only open when the virus is gone or the spread has slowed down significantly. Other parents said that they trust the schools to use all the screening and safety protocols to protect the children and staff at the schools.

This especially applies to our Special Needs Schools, Special Early Childhood Development Centres and our autistic children. Most of our children cannot wear a mask and the smell of the usual sanitisers is too strong for those who have Sensory difficulties. Concessions for these children have become a big problem.

Parents cannot go to the shops or other public places with their children and these vulnerable children cannot be left alone at home without supervision or care.



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Another debate we had was about the children 6 years and younger not wearing masks at all although this is a government regulation. Is it safe, are they going to get or spread the virus? And can ECD Centres open/ stay open for our young children? The sad reality is that many ECD Centres closed down permanently during this time. Practitioners and assistants are now without an income and children are without schools or centres to return to. Very few ECD Centres can be like the Phoenix and rise from the ashes again.

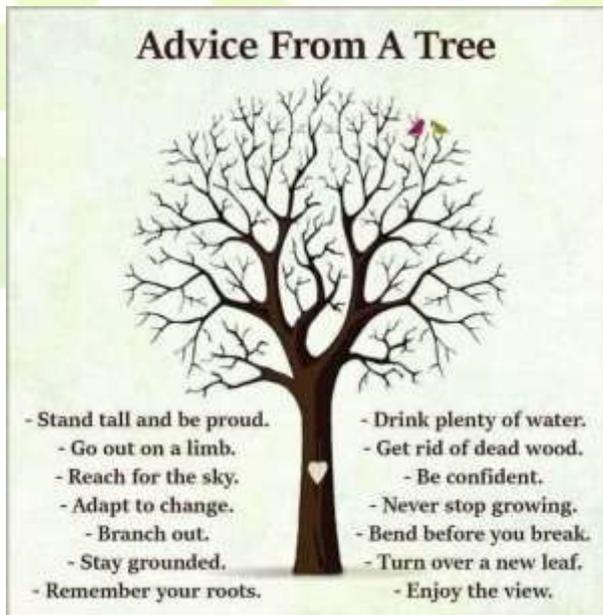
I would like to extend my sincere condolences to the family and colleagues of the late Superintendent General, Head of the Department of Education in the Eastern Cape, Mr Themba Kojana, who passed away after a short illness related to Covid-19 on January 2021. We have lost a great leader and his loss will be felt for a long time to come.

We hear almost daily of people we know passing away from this dreadful disease and I would like to caution everyone to please look after yourself and your loved ones. Wear your mask, wash your hands and use sanitiser as frequently as you can. Too many good people are gone; we need to realize that we are not going to stop the spread of this virus unless we all play our part.

It is really good to get back to work, almost as normal, after the holidays. I held my first Introduction to Autism workshop via zoom for 2021. Although we were only a few people, it was still good to share this valuable information with the participants. I am looking forward to the next one. Please contact me for information for the next one, everyone is most welcome to join, I will share a link with you to join. Contact me on my cell: 072 678 2452.

Many blessings from the beautiful Eastern Cape: until next time.

Inclusion means everyone, not just one!



We're all in this together; Hope, Love and Live!



Selinah Jele
Free State

Community Health Care Centre - 'MUCCP'

By: Bonolo Poonyane

MUCCP Support Group is an informal resource that attempts to support people experiencing various challenges. Informal support outside of family, friends, or professionals often provides greater understanding, more similarity (from individuals experiencing similar life events), an opportunity for empathy and altruism, and a sense of identity for participants. Learning new ways to handle challenges, cope with changes, and maintain new behaviours are all important aspects of the support group experience.

A characteristic unique to support groups is the mutual support members are able to provide one another. This support and validation from other group members helps facilitate personal growth and change in a way that individual therapy cannot.



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Although experts and professionals can provide support and positive direction, the mutual exchange of

information between group members is a powerful experience that often induces lasting change.

They usually have a set meeting time (generally weekly), and an open format. Open format means that the groups are ongoing, and members have the option of attending when it is convenient for them. This is in contrast to other types of structured treatment or psycho-educational groups that may meet for a certain number of sessions, with the expectation that participants attend every meeting. The open format allows members to feel some degree of anonymity, and to participate as they are comfortable. For some people, simply attending meetings and listening to the experiences of others can be helpful.

The healing power of groups is well documented, and support groups offer many of the same therapeutic characteristics as more structured groups. These factors include:

altruism (chance to help others), belonging, universality (there are others who struggle with similar challenges), interpersonal learning, guidance, catharsis, identification, self-understanding, hope, and existential factors (such as the search for larger meaning in life). Each of these factors is directly related to the mutual support that members provide one another.

Bonsai Learning Centre turns one

By: Selloane Moloji

Bonsai Learning Centre will be turning one this year and in such a short time Bonsai has grown in leaps and bounds. It is a new year that is filled with



new beginnings. They have added new programmes (such as art therapy, music box and mind moves) onto their curriculum programmes. This will assist with the development and growth of their autistic learners. Mind moves is a programme that focuses on exercise that teaches the senses, brain, and muscles to work simultaneously. When these three parts are integrated-information can flow freely and a child can perform tasks with greater ease.



Dineo Mosiane
North West

We are moving on ahead with Awareness, Accepting, Empowering and Supporting

On the 2 February 2021 we had our first face to face workshop after a long break. A learner from an Early Childhood Development centre in Mahikeng was recently diagnosed as autistic at the Mahikeng Provincial Hospital.

The principal Ms Phefo, contacted us to train all the staff on autism so, in order as to support the parents. Two parents of autistics children, five staff from nearby crechés and a primary school and staff from the hosting ECD attended the workshop. (all Covid-19 protocols adhered to).





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I received a call from the deputy principal of Diphetogo Primary School in Montshioa, Mrs Thapelo Perez. She wanted to have her staff upskilled prior to the actual start day of the school. So; on 12 February 2021 I hosted an Introduction to Autism workshop for 29 educators from the Foundation, Intermediate and Senior phases.

After the two-hour workshop, the educators were very emotional and regretted how they had unknowingly discriminated against autistic learners for most of their teaching careers, mostly due to a lack of knowledge. They would like workshops like this on other disabilities such as Down syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida, and development disorders.



This knowledge is necessary for them to identify barriers to learning, support needs of children and to properly complete the SIAS policy paper work.



Mary Moeketsi-Mpumalanga and Limpopo

Autism South Africa wishes to send sincere condolences to Mary Moeketsi on the loss of her husband, Kenneth. He was a loving and supportive husband, a caring father, a willing uncle, brother and friend to those who knew him. Being the father of an autistic son, he had a deep empathy for the parents that turned to Mary for support. Kenneth was always at Mary's side, as her driver while traversing 2 large provinces, being her sounding board during the long trips, being her support and her rock after an emotional, often frustrating and tiring day of dealing with desperate parents, doctors, therapists, educators and provincial officers in government departments. Not only was he supportive of Mary and the work that she did,

he truly was an ambassador for Autism South Africa. And when they finally had a quiet moment together, he would let Mary indulge her passion, by watching the cricket with her. Kenneth, you will be deeply missed!



**Rosemary Shezi
KwaZulu-Natal**

Autism SA would like to extend our sincere condolences to Rosemary on the loss of her mother. Rose always spoke very fondly of her mother, and what a tremendous support she was to her and her family. From the stories Rose shared with us about her mother, she was an inspiring figure in the lives of her children, her children's spouses and her grandchildren. We are deeply sorry for your loss Rose.





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What's Happening at Autism South Africa?

1. Online Hands On Autism is open for registration.

2. Face to Face: Hands-on-Autism in the provinces is also open for registration as per dates on poster; at R3850 per person.

Hands On Autism

HANDS ON AUTISM ONLINE
All the benefits of our face-to-face course in the comfort of your own home

JOIN US ONLINE

- How much? R1500
- How long? 30 hours - self study
- Where do I register?
<https://aut2know.co.za/services/>
- Video sessions with facilitators every month

TOPICS COVERED

- Typical Development
- What is Autism?
- Policy and Legal Framework in Education in South Africa
- Curriculums
- How to work with me
- Communication Strategies
- Sensory Strategies
- Behaviour that challenges
- Working with Parents
- Wellness for the Professional

a;sa
autism south africa

a;sa *proactive competence*
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HANDS ON AUTISM 2021

Dates & Venues	Topics Include
Mpumalanga, Nelspruit: 2-6 August	Autism - what it is and the latest research
North West: 22 -26 Feb (FULL) Rustenburg 13 - 17 September	Legal framework and policies in South African Education
Port Elizabeth: 31 May - 4 June East London: 19 - 23 July	How to work with and support the autistic learner - All support levels
Free state: Bloem: 10-14 May Qwa Qwa: 5-9 July	Communication, sensory and behaviour strategies
Kwazulu-Natal: 1-5 February (FULL) 19-23 April	Professional wellness and working with parents
Gauteng: 15-19 March	
Kimberley: 23-27 August	
Limpopo: 4-8 October	

Cost: R3850 per person
30 HPCSA CPD points
SACE and SCCSP points applied for
Practical and theoretical components

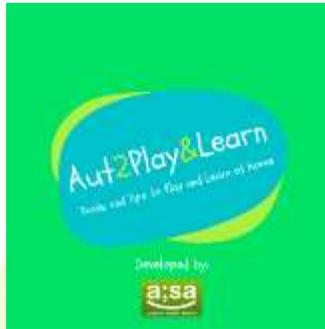
For more information and registration forms please contact
Lerato - admin@autismsouthafrica.org | 011 484 9909



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3. Eduboxes! Eduboxes! Play therapy in a box! Available for order at only R950 per box.



Edu-Boxes specifically designed for Autism now available.



R950.00 per kit - includes all toys and a manual with activities.
Free delivery nationwide.



4. Autism Awareness and Acceptance 2021 is already on the move...



In 2021 we are going to be doing things a little differently.

Autism South Africa will be hosting an art auction for autistic artists.

<p>What? All art categories are welcome - visual and written art</p>	<p>How? An online auction. We are asking autistic people of all ages to submit a piece of art, which will be auctioned off. Money made from the art piece will go back to the artist.</p>	<p>When? During the month of April 2021 - artwork submissions will open from the 1st October and will close on the 15th March.</p>
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CREATE

For more information and for submission forms please contact Vicky - educator@autismsouthafrica.org



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5. WAAD 2021 – World Autism Awareness and Acceptance:

Autism South Africa's Theme for 2021

**THINK NEURODIVERSTY
PRESUME COMPETENCE**

Please follow this link to download our "How to Guide" for April 2021. In the guide, we explain in detail what our theme for 2021 means. We also promote the awareness AND acceptance of autism!

<http://aut2know.co.za/world-autism-acceptance-month-april-2020/>

6. A;SA Membership is still open for all...

Log onto our website www.aut2know.co.za to download membership form or send email to info@autismsouthafrica.org.za or call 011 484 9909.

"What is happening in the rest of S.A?" Send your news to: media@autismsouthafrica.org

Sincere thanks to  **aram** HAND-TO-HAND COURIERS for ensuring information on autism from Autism South Africa A'SA is distributed throughout South Africa!



autism south africa
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braamfontein, 2001
p.o. box 84209 greenside, 2034
tel: +27 11 484 9909 / 9923
fax: +27 11 484 3171
e-mail: info@autismsouthafrica.org
web page : www.autismsouthafrica.org

Membership to Autism South Africa

It has been decided by the National Executive Committee of Autism South Africa, that, to ensure all people, regardless of their financial status, can become members of Autism South Africa, there will no longer be a set individual membership fee. However, the person wanting to become a member may pay whatever they feel they would like to or are able to.
(Group membership is R500 per annum).

NAME: _____

INVOLVEMENT WITH AUTISM: _____

PROVINCE: _____

TEL: _____

EMAIL: _____

DONATION FOR MEMBERSHIP: R _____

Communication from Autism South Africa

Due to the present economic climate and the difficulty in raising funding for services for people with Autism in South Africa, we now correspond with members by bulk email.
The following benefits will accrue to those individual members donating R50 or more per annum:-

- Information dissemination
- Have a voice in the community
- A 10% discount for Local Workshops and Conferences organised by A;SA

The following benefits will accrue to Group members:-

- Discounted rate for Local Workshops and Conferences organised by A;SA
- Three free bulk email drops per year to our database
- Three free advertisements per year in our monthly newsletter.

Banking Details
Autism South Africa
Standard Bank Sandton
Acc No.: 220731233; Branch Code: 019205
Reference: Name and Surname Membership (E.g. Sandy Klopper Membership)

Please remember to check out our social media pages regularly!