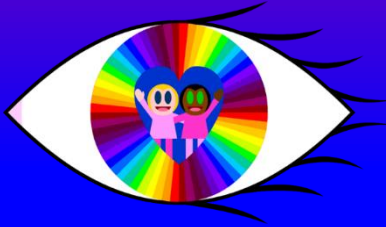


A Different Perspective CIC December 2023 Issue 12



In This Issue:

Wellbeing.

My PhD Research.

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The Parent Network.

Tips for a Comfortable Christmas.

Social Groups for Young People.

Progressive Education.

Quote:

*"Every day is a new
opportunity to start
again"- Cope
Scotland.*

Please get in touch:
[differentperspectives98
@gmail.com](mailto:differentperspectives98@gmail.com)

Hi Everyone,

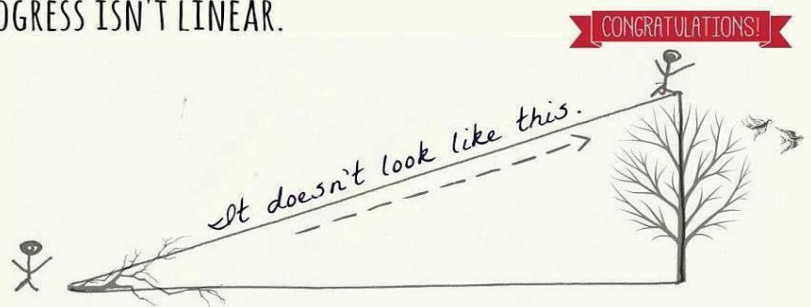
Welcome to the latest edition of our company newsletter. We would like to wish you all a lovely Christmas and New Year.

I would like to invite you to spend time reflecting on all you have achieved this year and what is most important to you. I encourage you to focus on the present moment and to do something that will make you and your body feel good.

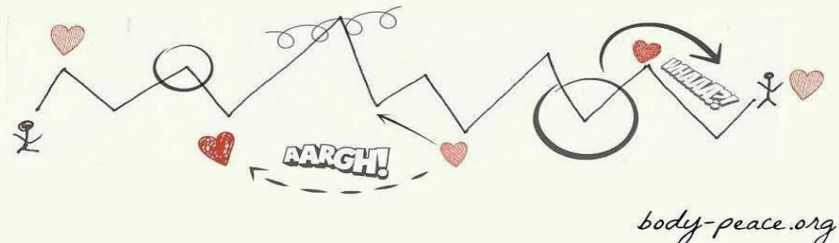
I'm looking forward to supporting more autistic young people and their families in 2024. As a small organisation, we are unfortunately restricted on what we can offer however we are incredibly grateful for all the support we have received.



PROGRESS ISN'T LINEAR.



PROGRESS IS FULL OF TWISTS AND TURNS, UPS AND DOWNS, BACKTRACKS AND SIDELOOPS. I PROMISE, YOU'RE DOING GREAT.



Online Training with Springfield's Academy.

I am honoured to be presenting a webinar for A-Fest Online with Springfields Academy. This will be held on Zoom on Thursday 22nd February from 3.30-4.30pm. This will be a free event. I will be sharing my educational experience as well as my research on friendships and support strategies. Please save the date!

Grove Neurodivergent Education and Mentoring.

A newly launched service offering online social groups, interest-based groups, autistic identity programmes, training and mentoring. They value community, connection and growth and support neurodiversity-affirming practice.

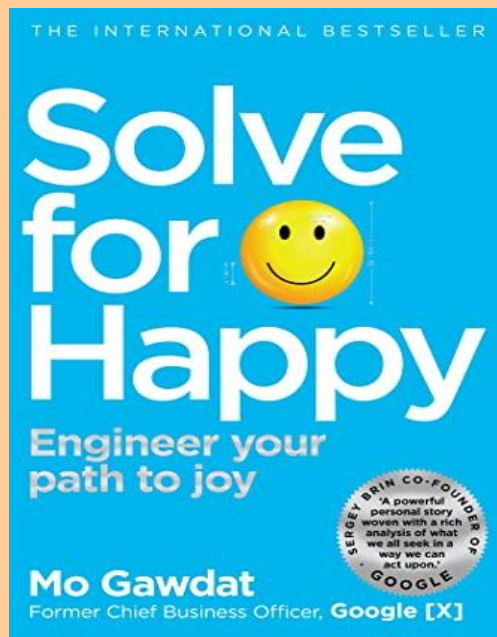
For more information and to get involved, please see: <https://gr0ve.org/>

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**Book
Recommendation:**



Solve for Happy – Engineer Your Path to Joy by Mo Gawdat.

'Special interests' are passions – they can support motivation, communication and emotional regulation. The ability to 'hyper-focus' can be an autistic strength.

"Don't fear to fail.
Be okay not knowing it all.
Love you for you.
Don't give up on you.
Laugh daily.
Accept things happen.
Live in the moment.
Trust yourself.
Appreciate what is good" –
COPE Scotland.

The Autism Arena: Autistic Wellbeing.

Wellbeing means being able to access positive relationships and education, doing what you enjoy and having a good life.

- Explore what autism means for you. What are you good at? What do you find more challenging? What do you do to rest?
- Figure out what activities you enjoy and find your boundaries.
- Reach out to the autistic community.
- Adapt your approach to supporting your own mental health – find what works for you (this may be running, writing, learning new things, spending time with pets, being in nature).
- Communicate in a way that suits you (this may be through writing or technology).
- Learn to recognise your stress triggers and tune in to how your body feels. What can you do right now to make your body feel good?
- You do not need to over-explain yourself. You do not need to put yourself under extra pressure.

Who am I now? What do I know from my past? What do I want my future to look like?

Ideas from Sarah O'Brien.

The Neurodivergents' Guide to Post-diagnosis Growth



A New Chapter Begins... Trusting the Process!

Before embarking on a PhD, I dubiously took a gap year allowing me to travel and learn about wellbeing and healing. As an autistic person striving to make the most of all opportunities and begin to discover who I really am, underneath the masks, this year turned out to be one of the best years yet.

Settling into PhD life has been daunting, especially given the unstructured and vague nature of the course. At times, it has been isolating. Though, I am fortunate to have supportive supervisors who understand my individual needs. I have tried to combine my research with my passions to help drive motivation.

I am hoping to research holistic wellbeing for autistic young people in alternative provision (AP) settings and whether they would like to reintegrate into mainstream school. Although it can be hard to define AP, generally it refers to a non-mainstream setting provided by the local authority (LA) for pupils who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons would not otherwise receive suitable education. Severe anxiety and emotionally based school non-attendance can be a legitimate reason. Exclusion is a common reason for a referral to AP; the Children's Commissioner shares how in England, there are forty-one permanent exclusions each day. There must be a greater understanding that all behaviour is communication; we need to identify and support the root causes of behaviour.

I hope to look at how AP settings support young people's holistic wellbeing. This includes social, emotional, physical, cognitive, spiritual, and creative wellbeing. Wellbeing can be defined as "feeling good and functioning well"; this incorporates having agency and a sense of purpose as well as developing positive relationships. The Scottish Government present the eight wellbeing indicators; every person has the right to be safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, and included.

From personal experience, AP can be nurturing, and the support can be likened to one of a 'family.' There are often smaller classes, greater flexibility, an opportunity for personalised learning and a focus on the teacher and student relationship.

However, some people believe that AP can further segregate autistic people. This depends on how inclusion is defined. Inclusion can mean the quality of education and support young people receive to learn and participate fully in all aspects of school life. The Scottish Government identifies four features of inclusion, including being present either in person or virtually, participating as fully as possible in all aspects of school life, achieving their full potential and being supported. The Department for Education state that eighty percent of fourteen- to sixteen-year-olds who enter AP may not return to mainstream. Some young people may not want to reintegrate to mainstream, as they associate mainstream with feelings of inadequacy. Although, if they do want to go back to mainstream, a list of support recommendations will be created to aid this.

My PhD ideas are a work in progress and will no doubt become clearer soon. However, I hope this gives you a flavour of what I hope to study over a three-year period. I would be more than happy to discuss my research and link up with educational settings who may be interested in my work.

Please follow me at 'A Different Perspective CIC' on Facebook and Twitter/email me at: differentperspectives98@gmail.com

Blog and photographs by Lauren Smith.



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A Day of SEND

Sandra and Barbie enjoyed attending 'A Day of SEND' at Priory Community School in October. This was organised by North Somerset Parent Carers Working Together (NSPCWT). We're proud that Adam delivered a presentation at this event, sharing his lived experience of autism and his career journey.



3-3-6 breath:

Inhale for 3,
pause for 3,
exhale for 6.

Candle breath:
Slowly blow out
an imaginary
candle on a
birthday cake.

Visualise fire in your
belly. Light this fire
everyday – what will
you do with this ball
of fire?

Create a collage of
meaning in your life
– write/draw what
you value and what
you would like.

The Parent Network:

Our Facebook page – The Parent Network - provides autism information, resources, and regular updates on parent meetups in North Somerset. We offer a safe space for parents to meet likeminded people, share experiences and gain support.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/parentnetwork21>

Tips for a Comfortable Christmas!

Enjoy the festive season in a way that works for you and your family.

Downtime with interests is important!

Stick to favourite foods. Eat at separate times if needed.

Reduce expectations to socialise. It is okay to say no.

Reduce visual stimuli – limit flashing lights, have an undecorated room.

Have few or no surprises – leave presents unwrapped or show what they are beforehand.

Celebrate over a few days to make it less overwhelming.

Use a visual timetable to explore any changes that will happen.

Shop at quieter times of day/try online shopping. Some shops have autism-friendly hours.



Recently, our social groups have enjoyed bowling, a trip to the helicopter museum and chocolate making. We have enjoyed meeting some new faces and are looking forward to upcoming events in 2024. We are always looking to welcome autistic children and young people who may benefit from engaging and structured activities in a safe environment, to help build confidence and friendships.

What It Means to be Neurodiversity-Affirming:

Authenticity – A feeling of being your genuine self. Being able to act in a way that feels comfortable and happy for you.

Acceptance – A process where you feel validated as the person you are not only by yourself but by others.

Agency – A feeling of control over actions and their consequences in your day to day life.

Autonomy – A state of being self-directed, independent, and free. Being able to act on your ideas and wants.

Advocacy – To speak for yourself, communicate what is important to you and your needs or the needs of others.

‘The 5 As of Neurodiversity-Affirming Practice’ by Kieran Rose.

15 Ways to Reimagine Education:

Raise the school starting age.

Prioritise play.

Place students in mixed age groups with mixed abilities.

Eradicate standardised tests which put pupils (and teachers) under unnecessary pressure.

Value creativity and innovation.

Prioritise mental health and wellbeing.

Practice democracy and mutual respect between staff and pupils.

Value self-directed education.

Broaden the National Curriculum.

Reduce the amount of time spent at school.

Enhance teacher training to equip teachers for the job.

Reduce class/school sizes.

Facilitate parent/teacher collaboration.

Equip students with the skills needed for adulthood and the workplace.

The education system is outdated. Create a new model for the 21st century.

Ideas from Progressive Education.

Please get in touch with our team if you would like more information about our work or would like to get involved with our projects. We would love to hear from you!