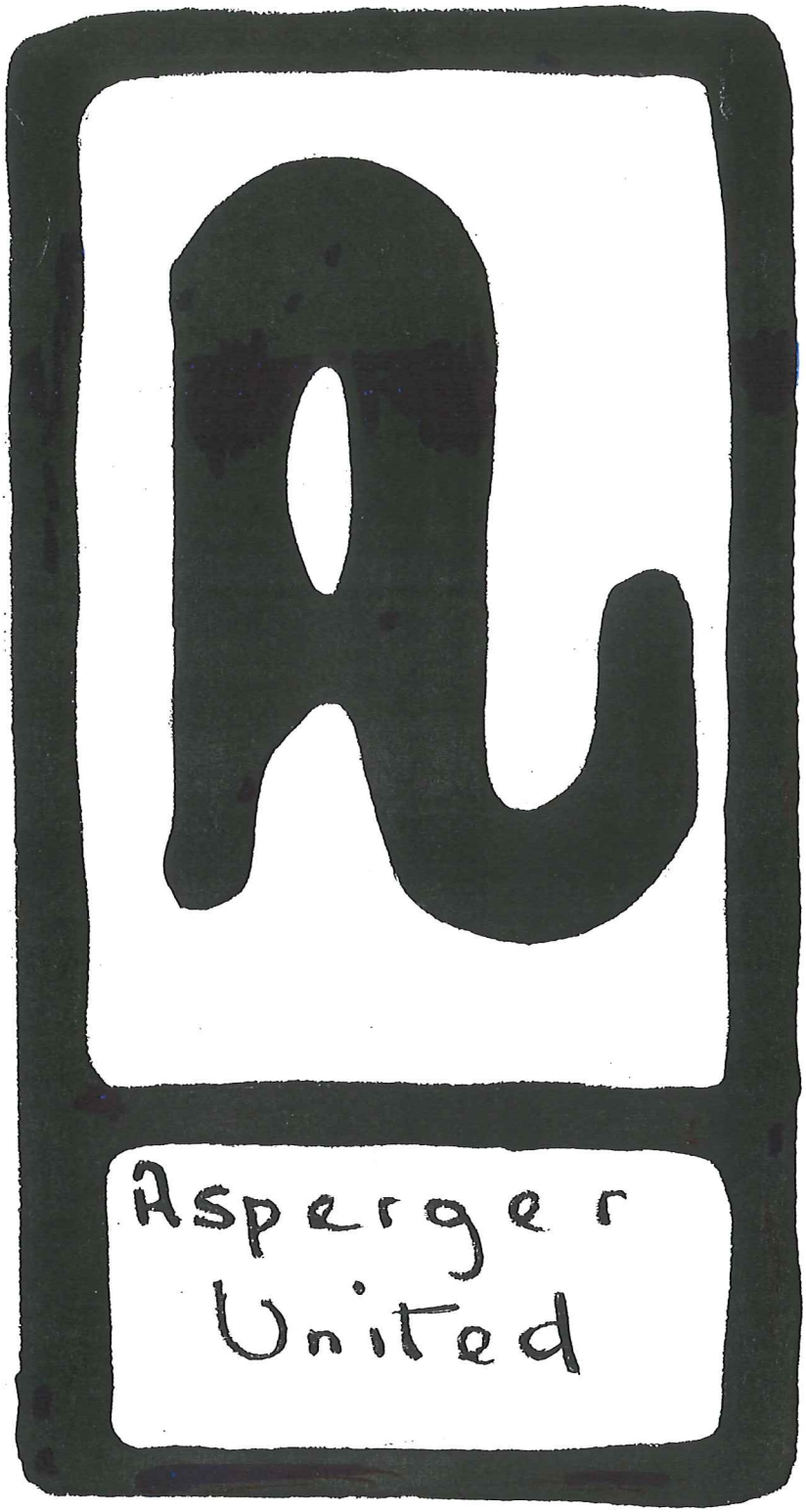

NO 6 - MARCH 1995

Asperger United is a self-help group run by and for people with Asperger Syndrome. Its aim is to put people with the condition in touch with one another and to provide them with information so that they can lead more independent lives.

EDITORIAL ON EMPLOYMENT

WHAT GIVES DISABLED PEOPLE THE RIGHT TO HAVE JOBS?

I have been asked to write on employment. However, my title is different. It gives the impression that life is not easy. This of course is true.

Why have I gone about my task like this? Well first the facts.

1) Not all disabled people are employed far from it. My approach may be strange.

2) Until recently there was hardly any laws for disabled people at work.

3) Some conservative MP's will tell you "they really care" this is not the case! The facts are that many disabled people feel upset about a system of work that does not apply to them.

4) Yes, some people who are disabled have jobs. This does not mean that all work in this area should stop, far from it.

What should be done?

1) More schemes and ways of finding a job for autistic and other disabled people.

2) People inside the charities and disabled industries should go towards finding jobs for all unemployed or disabled people.

At present the Conservative Government has a long way to go until unemployment starts going down and industry generally stops losing workers. A good idea maybe to aim for ½ million out of work not just under 2 million as it is at present.

The reader will now notice that my views are extremely controversial on this subject. This should not worry you. I am the Editor not a mad Tory! I hope you know that as far as Dave Wright is concerned the situation won't rest until I am satisfied with a much lower unemployment figure, infact I would like "unemployment" to become "a forgotten word".

Have faith in yourself, try to achieve things, be positive. Life is not all gloom and doom.

Your Editor and caring boss

Dave Rave Wright
Asperger United
Editor on Employment and other issues.

'FROM IAN REYNOLDS'

Hallo again

Seen OLIVER, first night of the show before Christmas, it was very good. I had a very nice Christmas and have been busy.

The work scheme the National Autistic Society sent out was good and I think it will help all of us get work so that the employer can understand our condition and know what it is all about and I hope we all can get work from it. There is still a group at the hospital, but it is on Mondays now and I hope it helps them all what Pat and Pam discuss and they are getting all help they want.

I hope you all enjoyed the last Newsletter and there were lots of articles you liked. We are hoping to make it a Newsletter that you very much enjoy and I hope you are all getting on OK. I still play my golf and go out to cheap shows and opera and ballet and hoping some of you have booked shows or opera or ballet or if seen have enjoyed them and might go again sometime. There are always new shows on in London theatres from time to time.

January '95 - Been to the Boat Show Earls Court, London. February 12th - seen concert at Opera House, Covent Garden, London. Opera House booking forms are out now for opera/ballet booking period February - March '95 out now some performances sold out. Opera/Ballet booking period April - May '95. If you go to book for period 3 and want period 4 form, ask for booking form as well mailing list to go back to Opera House before February 20th to qualify for mailing list advance booking if you yourself are interested but general public last on list no list number needed unless they send you one, or you can join the mailing for £8 a year, then you would be second on list or you can become a friend of Covent Garden Opera House for £37 roughly, for that form contact Friends Office on 0171 212 9412 and for mailing list form and the others you will find them in the Opera House foyer box office across the road from the side entrance in the same road. Telephone bookings/personal bookings March 20th for period 4/3 booking now and for theatre shows pick up a list at a west end theatre. Lists out about 2 a month.

PROFESSIONAL SECTION

ADVICE ON FINDING A JOB... AND HOW TO KEEP IT

Patricia Howlin, Pamela Yates, May 1993

This article first appeared in Asperger United No.2 in August 1993.

HOW TO GO ABOUT LOOKING FOR A JOB

Finding a job is one of the biggest problems you'll face after leaving school or college, especially if you've already been unemployed for some time. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOU'RE A FAILURE! In these times of recession even many very skilled and intelligent people find themselves out of work and any one with even a mild disability is at a disadvantage. If you want to be successful here are ten useful hints:

1) **Register as Disabled !**
This may not sound terribly attractive but has the enormous advantage of allowing access to the Disability Employment Adviser (DEA) who may be an important source of help. A diagnostic label will be needed from the consultant involved in treatment. This does not necessarily have to stress the autism itself; it might, for example, focus on your communication problems instead. Although there is a government ruling that big companies should employ at least 3% of people with disabilities in their workforce not all of them comply with this. However, some large firms have a very positive policy of employing people with disabilities and if you are registered as disabled you are likely to increase your chances of employment in such companies.

2) **Contact the DEA through the local Job Centre for advice about finding jobs; also try the local Special Careers Officer.**
When discussing job opportunities with them it's important to take your own interests and skills into account and to concentrate on jobs that will make use of these.

3) **Enlist the help of specialist employment agencies -**
e.g: Status Employment, Croydon. Tel: 081 681 3178
Excel Recruitment, Hornsey. Tel: 081 347 8756
MENCAP Pathway Services (if available locally), or,
PACT, your local Placing, Assessment and Counselling Team
(Get the address from the Job Centre).

4) **Contact specialist training organisations -**

e.g:	Accord, Brixton.	Tel: 071 274 2299
	OUTSET (North and SE London)	Tel: 081 692 7141
	Shaw Trust	Tel: 0372 728287

5) **Find out as much as possible about job opportunities -**
Information is available from the Education, Training and Employment Advisor, MENCAP, 115 Golden Lane, EC1Y OTJ in their "London Wide Directory of Opportunities in Employment for People with Learning Difficulties" (other directories also available). Explore voluntary work with charitable organisations. Ask your DEA about local Sheltered Employment schemes.

6) **Find out about special education courses/pre-vocational training -**
Information available from: ACCESS Tel: 071 486 5811 Ext. 6275
MENCAP Directories on further education and adult education. Local adult education classes.

7) **Find out about what local TEC'S, Enterprise schemes etc. can offer -**
Also explore YTS and Employment Training schemes (ET's) run by the Training Council (used to be known as Manpower Services Commission).

8) **Find out about special financial support -**
Contact local branches of The Shaw Trust. Enlist help of local social services for advice about benefits. Contact local CMHT (Community Mental Handicap Team) for advice and support.

9) **Get out and meet other people -**
Job clubs; sports centres; adult education centres, etc. If you can't get paid work try the voluntary agencies instead, or contact local homes, hostels or hospitals for people who are elderly, sick or disabled. You'll be working for a good cause and it will help in your applications for "proper" jobs.

10) **Find out about further education courses and adult education classes -**
Get list from the library of Adult Education Classes (day and evening) in your area. Contact local MENCAP offices for advice about specially designed courses in further and adult education for people with special needs. Most adult education colleges have a particular contact person who will be able to help. In London the address for information is:

115 Golden Lane, EC1Y OTJ. Tel: 071 454 0454

APPLYING FOR A JOB

Find a friend or family member with a word processor and printer and get them to help you type out your Curriculum Vitae (CV). This should give a straightforward account of your training and education to date and should stress your SKILLS as far as possible. You may need to alter your CV a bit according to the sort of job you are applying for, to make sure it's relevant which is why it's best to keep it on computer. Do not try to cover up gaps in your employment history with "white lies" of any kind; you'll only get found out in the end and that will be embarrassing, to say the least. Be honest about why you've not got a job at present but don't feel obliged to go into this in great detail; instead make sure you make the company aware of how your skills will be of advantage to them.

Do not be tempted to apply for jobs at too high a level. You may think you are quite capable of holding a managerial post or want only to work for a particular airline, for example, but no-one ever starts at the top. You will need experience and training first and it is much better to take a post that allows you to learn basic skills, than to search for the "perfect" job. This may mean accepting a rather low level of job initially, but if you succeed at that, and manage to stay in the same job for a couple of years, then it will be much easier to find a more demanding post later.

GOING FOR AN INTERVIEW

Don't just expect to turn up on the day and find that everything goes smoothly; you'll have to do a lot of homework first.

Firstly, find out all you can about what the job involves, by talking to someone in the company if you can or reading up about them if you can't. This will enable you to sound knowledgable and interested at the interview and to make a strong case for how your particular areas of skill can be useful for the company.

Secondly, practice your interviewing techniques with a member of the family or a friend, going over pretend questions and answers until you feel comfortable with them. Making a video or audio recordings is an even better way of correcting your mistakes.

Thirdly, make sure you know where you have to go for the interview and how long it will take to get there. A trial journey the day before may be well worthwhile.

Finally, make sure that you are spotlessly clean and smartly dressed. It won't matter how well qualified you are if you look a mess!

KEEPING A JOB

Once in a job it can be difficult to understand all the rules that other people seem to cope with, without even being told. Even using the telephone can be a problem; coping with change in routine can be especially difficult. Making sure that reports and work sheets are properly written up or that records are kept accurately and neatly, especially if there is no-one there to nag you all the time, is also often difficult. Planning projects in advance; taking the initiative in developing new projects or working co-operatively, on a team basis with others, can all present difficulties.

In particular, not keeping to deadlines, failing to finish work on time, or to get in on time in the morning are all common causes of people losing their jobs; as of course are outbursts of temper or rudeness.

Not paying enough attention to personal hygiene or standards of dress is also a good way of quickly offending people. Invading people's sense of personal space, by using their things, standing too close, listening to their conversations, asking questions all the time or talking about your own special interests are all likely to make you unpopular, even if your work skills are good.

SOME SIMPLE GUIDELINES TO HELP AVOID SUCH PROBLEMS

Never be afraid to ask for help. There are ways of improving social skills; of increasing work performance; of controlling feelings of anger or frustration and professional advice can be very valuable.

Be honest about your problems. Explain to people that you have a communication problem (they probably won't understand the term "Autism") and that you have difficulties understanding rules, and particularly social situations without help. If you think it might be helpful, the National Autistic Society, or other professionals who know a lot about autism, would be able to provide your employer with a brief pamphlet explaining about the types of problems that people with autism or Asperger Syndrome tend to experience at work.

Tell them to let you know AS SOON AS YOU HAVE DONE SOMETHING THEY DON'T LIKE.

Explain that you will need to ask for help or guidance more often than other people and don't be afraid to ask for such help as soon as you need it - waiting around only makes problems worse. If it helps, it may be worth checking what you are expected to do each day with your manager and then making a written list of all the tasks that need to be done. You can then tick these off as you finish them and this will help avoid the need to bother people too often throughout the day.

If you do need to ask for help, try to do this when other people aren't already in the middle of a conversation or finishing off a complicated task. Keep requests brief and concise and don't hang over people when you go to see them.

Try to develop other ways of helping yourself; keeping lists of important things to be done; keeping a diary; planning in advance; reorganising your daily timetable in a more effective way can help to solve problems before they get out of hand. If talking on the telephone is something you find difficult practise with friends or family outside office hours.

Learn to recognise your own feelings so that you can ask for help, or avoid unpleasant situations, as soon as you start to feel frustrated or confused. If you don't take avoiding action straight away things will just get worse.

Learn to relax when things get difficult - there are lots of successful distraction techniques to be learned but you'll need some specialist advice first.

Make sure you shave and bathe every day if possible, and wash your hair frequently. Change shirts and socks and underclothes DAILY; make sure the rest are washed or cleaned regularly. Have a good look in the mirror to make sure zips are fastened, buttons done up and shirts tucked in etc. If you have not been working for some time you may well have got into the habit of going to bed and getting up late so you will need to make sure that you reorganise your routine in order to have enough time for all these things each morning.

DON'T TALK ABOUT YOUR SPECIAL INTERESTS IN THE OFFICE OR SHOP, keep that for when you are not working and even so remember that other people may not be as fascinated by such things as you are. Just because people are too polite to tell you to go away does not mean they are really interested. When in doubt, keep quiet!

Don't borrow people's desks, pens, telephones etc. without asking, and even then keep such requests to a minimum. Don't let other people borrow your things too often either.

Just because staff in the office (especially if you are a man and they are female) are kind to you doesn't mean they want a close friendship. Asking people for a date, or expecting them to spend a lot of time with you out of work, simply because they are polite will only lead to trouble. Keep your distance until you really get to know them well, and this can take many months. You can, however, still be friendly to them, greeting them in the morning, smiling when you see them and responding when they speak to you. It is particularly important to treat your managers with respect. So, for example, it's better to address them as Mr or Mrs or Ms until they suggest you use their Christian names.

Finally, although making friends is important, never let people persuade you into doing things that you know are silly, dangerous or illegal, or will get you into trouble in some way, just because it will please them. Stand up for yourself and your principles and don't be afraid to say "No" firmly if necessary.

EALING LEAP SERVICE

Unit 12
Cranleigh Gardens Industrial Estate
Cranleigh Gardens
Southall
Middlesex UB1 2BZ

Telephone: 0181-571 7714
Fax: 0181-574 9459

THE NATIONAL AUTISTIC SOCIETY

276 Willesden Lane, London NW2 5RB
Tel: 081-451 1114 Fax: 081-451 5865

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SCHEME

ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A JOB?

IF YOU HAVE ASPERGER SYNDROME AND YOU ARE TRYING TO FIND WORK OR WOULD LIKE SUPPORT IN YOUR PRESENT JOB THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SCHEME IS HERE TO HELP:

The project aims to find employment for people with Autism or Asperger Syndrome. The scheme is funded by the **Department of Employment** and has been established by the **National Autistic Society** in conjunction with the **Employers Forum on Disability**.

We hope to find jobs which use your skills and qualifications while acknowledging that you may find certain things difficult. People with Autism and Asperger Syndrome may for example find it hard to work in a very busy office or a job which involves a lot of customer contact.

The Supported Employment Scheme can help you with all aspects of job hunting: compiling **CVs**, filling out **application forms**, and preparing for **interviews**.

We can also give you support once you have a job. Job Coaches will be available if you need any help while settling into a new job and to support you through any difficulties that might arise at work. The Job Coaches will have a knowledge and understanding of the effects of Autism and Asperger Syndrome.

A number of organisations on the Employers Forum for Disability have shown a commitment to the scheme and James Graham, our Employer Liaison Officer, is currently exploring a wide range of jobs in the **Greater London** area.

Patron: HRH The Princess Royal
Chief Executive: Geraldine Peacock

BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM.

The National Autistic Society is a Company limited by guarantee. Registered in England No. 1205298. Registered Office: 276 Willesden Lane, London NW2 5RB. Registered as a charity No. 269425.

If you are interested in the Scheme (whether you want help finding a job or would like support in your present job) please complete the form attached to this letter and send it to;

N.A.S. Supported Employment Scheme
Unit 12
Cranleigh Gardens Industrial Estate
Southall
Middx. UB1 2BZ

If you have any questions you could ring the office on : 081 813 8621

I look forward to hearing from you

Catherine Burkin
(Co-ordinator)

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SCHEME

Name:_____

Address:_____

_____

_____Telephone number:_____

I am interested in the N.A.S. Supported Employment Scheme

Yes ☐ No ☐

I am prepared to work in the Greater London Area

Yes ☐ No ☐

I am looking for Full-time ☐ Part-time ☐ work.

The types of job I am interested in are;

I would like to discuss my employment prospects - (please state the times/days of the week you are likely to be free)

LETTERS/CONTACTS

Please note - In order to ensure the privacy of contributors to Asperger United full addresses will not be printed. If you would like to reply to any of the letters or requests for contacts please write to the N.A.S and we will pass your letter on to the appropriate person.

Hello

Although I previously sent in two letters to Asperger United (sounds like a football team). Neither of them appeared. I am, however, sending this very brief one although it probably won't appear either.

In the last issue, the Editor appealed for letters from auties (Asperger's). One difficulty is that a lot of auties won't know what to write about without being given an example. So far, most of the examples in Asperger United are of people writing about benefits and employment and conferences and generally the sort of things that the professionals have encouraged them to be aware of and think about. For this reason, I thought I might suggest some possible alternative write-in topics. You could just pick one and write something about it, filling in the blanks:

* What I like most about the world is.....because.....
* What I hate most about the world is.....because.....
* What I like most to do is.....because.....
* What I hate most to do is.....because.....
* My favourite place is.....because.....
* My worst place to be is.....because.....
* What confuses me most about life is.....because.....
* What frustrates me most about life is....because.....
* Some of the things I'd like to do if I could are.....
* Here's my (earliest/most vivid/happiest/saddest/most scarey) memory.....
* Here's a dream I had.....
* Here's a poem I wrote.....
* Here's a picture I drew.....
* Here's a story I wrote.....
* The trouble I have with relationships is.....

* The best relationship I have ever had is.....(to my dog/plant/tree/brother/rock collection/aunt etc)6
* The reason I am more than just a bundle of Asperger Syndrome is.....
* Some of the things that stop me doing what I want to do/say are.....
* Some of the things that make me most uncomfortable/stressed/tuned out are .... because.....
* The hardest thing about listening to people is.....because.....
* The hardest thing about talking with people is .....because.....

That's all. From **DONNA VENABLES (nee Williams)**

* * * * *

I am 24 years old and live at home with my parents and younger brother. I have had difficulties all my life with communication and friendships and have only recently been diagnosed as Asperger Syndrome. I have a degree and had been unemployed for 4 years due to my difficulties until recently. I like cycling, science, astronomy, own a motorcycle and am concerned about the environment. I would like to meet someone similar to myself, with similar interests - especially cycling, for friendship and understanding.

From **GARETH BATEMAN**

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Update from Paul Lowe, Churchdown, Gloucester

In my previous article (Issue 2, August 1993), I mentioned that I was diagnosed as having Asperger Syndrome in 1992. The medical I had that year merely suggested Asperger Syndrome and I was formally diagnosed in the summer of 1994.

Just after the 1992 medical, I did a two-day assessment at Gloucester Job Centre run by the Placing, Assessment & Counselling Team (PACT). This consisted of written and general clerical tests. I was then referred to Bridge Training, Word Processing, Spreadsheets, Databases, filing and proof-reading. During the assessment period (October to December 1992), I was still officially employed by the Shaw Trust on the Government's Sheltered Placement Scheme at Gloucester Land Registry and my Shaw Trust Development Officer advised me to go on sick pay due to anxiety and concentration lapses at work.

I stayed on Sick Pay until April 1993 and during this time my Shaw Trust Officer found out about the Employment Training facilities and Group Homes in Nailsworth for people with autism/Asperger Syndrome. The Land Registry staff decided not to keep me there and, having received a positive assessment report from Bridge Training, I chose to go on Training For Work there for a year. I was also told that I would eventually be spending one day a week at the Employment Training Unit in Market Street, Nailsworth for those with autism/Asperger Syndrome.

For those who do not know, the Employment Training facilities in Nailsworth for autistic people consist of two training units, one of which has a Lima Silkwear Design Shop attached to it. There are 16 clients there (including me), 12 of whom live in the three Group Homes connected with the training facilities. The purpose of these training units is to develop personal awareness and social skills, and provide support within working environments and at other training providers, as well as developing clients' working skills.

I began working at Nailsworth in January 1994. My tasks there have been balancing the petty cash, working in the Lima Designs Shop, answering the telephone sometimes and occasionally helping with work sent into the Unit by other organisations. Alison and Adrian, two of the staff, run a Lima Painting Shop at Uley. Several of the clients go there regularly, and I have been there a few times to work.

The other unit, at Spring Mill Business Park, and the Avening Road, opened in November. It is used for City & Guilds Numeracy & Literacy and for personal awareness sessions on Wednesday mornings, which have so far included looking at newspaper articles, doing and listening to tape recordings, setting and answering questions on these things, watching videos and answering questions on them prepared by the Staff, as well as the usual relaxation sessions to begin with.

The training staff appointed a new job coach in November and two week after she started, I began a second day at the training facilities which has been spent so far looking at work opportunities. The idea of having a job coach is that she goes into the work place with the client, the client and her both have a look at the job together, and she sees how the client copes in a normal working environment. The job coach's support is available for as long as is necessary and through the Access To Work scheme, and even after it is felt that the client no longer needs the support of a job coach, she or any other member of staff at Nailsworth can be called into the workplace should any further problems arise.

During my time spent with the job coach, we have enquired about a few possible placements in Quedgeley, Gloucester Centre and Nailsworth. I had an interview with the Disabled Employment Adviser (DEA) at Gloucester Job Centre just before Christmas and he is waiting for a medical report from Doctor Axson at Coney Hill Hospital, who arranged my formal diagnosis of Asperger Syndrome, a report from Bridge Training Resources and a report from the Employment Training Staff at Nailsworth. I am registered with Ecco Employment Agency in Gloucester and I managed to achieve a word processing speed of 57 words per minute with only 2 mistakes with them.

I feel that I have enjoyed my time at Nailsworth and have got on well with the clients and staff there. I have a steady girlfriend there who happens to be the only female client. I also get on particularly well with the clients in her Group Home, the staff who work there, the training staff and one of the other clients who has an obsession for talking about football, cricket, politics and travel by road and train, and laughing to himself without sharing the joke.

I finished on Training For Work at Bridge Training in April 1994. Since then I have been going there for 2 days a week on a voluntary basis and managed to pass my NVQ Level 1 exam in Business Administration in September.

Outside training, I have joined the Gloucester Operatic & Dramatic Society (known as the GODS for short). I have done two shows with them - 'Billy', a musical based on 'Billy Liar' and 'Calamity Jane'. In 'Billy', I appeared as an Arab, a milkman, a football supporter and a 1960s nightclub goer, and in 'Calamity Jane', I appeared as a Red Indian who is meant to be rejected by the rest of the characters, a Stage Door Johnny and a dance goer travelling through a pass in the Black Hills Of Dakota. Even though I was not meant to react much as an Indian in the Saloon Bar Scenes, I joined in the music with the rest of the chorus nevertheless.

The Society owns the New Olympus Theatre in Gloucester and I feel that there is a good structure to the Society, there being a wide age group, there being a members' bar, and there generally being a lot of other work to do besides acting and singing. I hope to be able to do Front Of House when I am not acting or singing.

I am also still in the Churchdown Choral Society and I still enjoy long distance walks, watching and listening to football, pop music, going to the theatre to see musicals, and church activities with young people and those with learning and other disabilities. I am 27 later this month and would like to hear form people with similar interests to mine, preferably in their 20s, or of any age.

Paul Lowe
January 1995

DESMOND'S STORY

I am a single man aged forty-seven and have Aspergers' Syndrome. I attended mainstream schools and, at first, coped well academically. However, I was prone to a certain amount of teasing although eventually I made friends. I also did well at piano lessons gaining a grade two certificate.

At the age of thirteen I passed an entrance examination securing me a place in a private school in West London. Three years later I sat my 'O' levels, failing in every subject due to difficulties I was having in the school. I resat them after attending a local tutorial for two years. This time I obtained passes in four subjects.

I then started work in the Civil Service, but left after a year as I had difficulty in coping with the work.

After a variety of jobs and a spell in a psychiatric hospital, I took up a clerical post in a cement company. Here I was fortunate to have a colleague who was sympathetic to my problems and helped me greatly. I remained there for ten years before joining Barnet Council, staying with them until Easter 1993 when I was made redundant due to cutbacks.

Since I have been made redundant, I have been combining helping out my parents at their home with volunteering two days a week at the office of the North East London Autistic Society. I live on my own, drive a car and am a member of a local motor club, helping out at their events. I am also on the social committee of my church, enjoy model railways and at the moment am doing an evening class in word processing.

As for the future, this is very uncertain but I feel that I would like to involve myself in helping others with Aspergers' syndrome in whatever way I can.

DESMOND MELDRUM

* * * * *

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A new social club has been set up for Asperger/Able Autistic People in South Wales. The club - called "People Like Us" meets monthly in Radyr Youth Centre, Radyr, Cardiff. Anyone interested will be most welcome. For details contact John and Barbara Keylock, telephone number 0656 786353.

FUTURE TOPICS FOR ASPERGER UNITED

In a future edition of Asperger United we plan to look at the special talents many people with Asperger Syndrome possess and how they can possibly help them get a job. If you have such a talent, eg. writing songs, painting pictures, speaking foreign languages, whatever, please write and let us know.

* * * * *