Visual Impairment and Autism
Newsletter, December 2011

Introduction
Welcome to this newsletter. The contacts list continues to grow, so I’ll risk boring long-standing readers by repeating the background information given in the last issue. The newsletters were first circulated by the Visual Impairment and Autism Project which ran from September 2008 to March 2011. They are compiled by Ian Bell, an independent specialist speech and language therapist, who was the Project Leader.

I am displaying the logos again, despite the fact that the Visual Impairment and Autism Project finished at the end of March. The logos are a reminder that the Project was a partnership between these four organisations.

Unfortunately, it is still not clear just how the Project’s work will be developed. Judy Bell (formerly National Development Officer; Multiple Disability, RNIB Children’s Services, now an independent consultant) co-ordinated the Project for RNIB and is still involved with me in keeping alive the topic of visual impairment and autism. We remain a point of contact for those interested in visual impairment and autism, and will maintain both the postal and email addresses (see below).

RNIB retain the visual impairment and autism pages on their website. They were up-dated in September, following the last newsletter. The address is www.rnib.org.uk/autism.

New website
Over the past few months I have been developing my own website. This is a lengthy task, and I will post additional material as time permits. My intention is to share my work with all those who have a similar interest in the communication skills of children and adults who have visual impairment, particularly those who have additional needs. The site includes a page on
visual impairment and autism. Currently, as well as this newsletter and the last, this page only provides a little information about the Project and the Resource Pack. In due course, I intend to provide some articles here. The website is at http://ianpbell.wordpress.com/.

Mary Kitzinger Trust workshop

In the last newsletter, I provided information about some events that were about to take place. All were successful in keeping a focus on the topic of visual impairment and autism. I want to mention one of those events again. This was the workshop arranged by the Mary Kitzinger Trust. It took place on Saturday 12th November at the Institute of Child Health in London. Judy and I provided those present with an up-date on the Project and described the Resource Pack. Some years ago when the Project was still only an idea, the Trust provided us with a platform, enabling us to explain our ideas. The Project received considerable support and encouragement at that meeting, so we were very keen to report back.

The Mary Kitzinger Trust workshops are an excellent way for practitioners to keep in touch with the latest research on children who have visual impairment. For information about the trust and its workshops, visit http://www.marykitzingertrust.org/.

Resource Pack

If you have not yet purchased the Resource Pack developed by the Project team, now is an excellent time to do so. At only £10, it would make an excellent Christmas present for yourself or a colleague!

Some weeks ago we started work on producing a glossy flier for the Pack. This was in the belief that it was not selling very well, and we felt we needed to boost sales. However, we then discovered that far more had been sold than we first thought: 286 copies by mid November. Only 500 copies were produced. So, if you do wish to obtain the Pack, it would be wise to order it soon – before it sells out!

The glossy flier idea was abandoned and instead we produced a plainer version which I am sending out with this newsletter. The flier describes the Resource Pack and provides information on purchasing it. Please do pass the flier on to anyone you expect to be interested. Obviously, the easiest and greenest way to share it is by email. But, if you feel it’s appropriate, please do print it and pass it on, or display it somewhere to attract attention.
Evaluation of the Resource Pack

The formal Resource Pack evaluation is now getting under way. It is being undertaken by Sue Keil (Research Officer, RNIB) and Teresa Whitehurst (formerly Research and Development Officer, Sunfield, now an Independent Consultant). Judy and I will also have some involvement.

The Pack will be evaluated through a questionnaire survey of purchasers and users of the Resource Pack. If you wish to contribute to the evaluation, please do get in touch with us: the email and postal addresses are given at the end of the newsletter.

The National Autistic Society website

The NAS has a comprehensive website which includes articles about conditions related to autism. I contributed an article some time ago on visual impairment and autism, and this is now on-line. To read the article, visit http://www.autism.org.uk/about-autism/related-conditions/visual-impairment-and-autism-spectrum-disorders.aspx.

ICEVI-Europe Newsletter

In order to promote the Resource Pack, Judy contacted the European Region of the International Council for Education and Rehabilitation of People with Visual Impairment, asking for their assistance. They were good enough to invite us to write an article for their on-line newsletter. Ian submitted an article which is in the newsletter for December 2011. It is available at http://www.icevi-europe.org/enletter/issue48.html#a11.

Book on visual impairment and autism

There are very few books on visual impairment and autism, so I thought it was important to let you know of one that I have only just become aware of. Therefore, it is not included in any of the reading lists compiled during the Project, and is not referred to in the Resource Pack. The book in question is:

If any of you have read this book, I would be most grateful to have your impressions of it. Contact details are below.

For more information about it, visit http://www.tsbvi.edu/curriculum-a-publications/3/1023-better-together-building-relationships.

Please pass on this Newsletter
If you know of anyone who is not yet aware of the Project’s work, but who is interested in visual impairment and autism, please do pass this newsletter on. Obviously, the easiest and greenest way is to share it by email. But, if you feel it’s appropriate, please do print it and pass it on, or display it somewhere to attract attention.

Newcomers to visual impairment and autism
If this Newsletter is your introduction to visual impairment and autism, welcome. If you wish to be added to our database, or if you have any comments or queries, please do contact us – contact details follow.

Also, please do visit our web-pages at: www.rnib.org.uk/autism

Contact details
For now, the visual impairment and autism email address is still

vi-autism.medina@tiscali.co.uk

The postal address is:
C/o Medina House, Mill Lane
Codsall
Wolverhampton
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If you do not wish us to retain your name and email address, please email (address above) and asked to have your details removed. But, please note: if we do not have your details, we will be unable to send any further news-letters or other up-dates.