Introduction

Welcome to this newsletter concerning visual impairment and autism. Although this comes relatively soon after the last newsletter (which I sent out in July) I am very aware that July is not a good time to send circulars to those who work in educational settings, as it is a busy time of year in the run-up to the summer holiday. Because of this, I thought I would compile another newsletter and repeat a couple of items, in case you missed them in July. I also report on a third retirement to add to the two I told you about in July.

Training opportunities in Visual Impairment and Autism

There are two training opportunities I wish to bring to your attention. In chronological order they are:

1. I am presenting a seminar at the National Autistic Society conference, “Autism and complex needs” in Birmingham on Tuesday 15th October 2013. My title is “Supporting children with visual impairment and ASD; guidance for practitioners”. This one-day conference is aimed at exploring best practice around supporting people with autism who have complex needs. For more information and to book, visit [http://www.autism.org.uk/conferences/complexneeds2013](http://www.autism.org.uk/conferences/complexneeds2013).

2. I am delivering a 1-day course at the Scottish Sensory Centre, Edinburgh on Friday 8th November. The course title is “An introduction to visual impairment and autism in children and young people”. The course costs £110. For further information and to make a booking, visit [http://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/courses/VI&multi/vnov13.html](http://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/courses/VI&multi/vnov13.html).

The Scottish Sensory Centre course will be substantially the same as the one I delivered in June at RNIB Pears Centre for Specialist Learning in
Coventry. The evaluations from this course were positive. For example, 90% of respondents rated the “Range and level of content” as “Very good” or “Good”. The course was over subscribed and the Pears Centre has a list of people who enquired about the course after the places were all taken. It is possible that the course will be put on again in the coming months. If so, I will let you know via email or in another newsletter.

If you are interested in attending a re-run of the Pears Centre course, you may like to contact Sophie Edge and express an interest: Sophie.Edge@rnib.org.uk.

Retirement of another key figure

In the July newsletter, I informed you of the retirement of two key figures in the field of visual impairment and autism: Peter Hobson and Linda Pring.

When I emailed the newsletter, I received an automated reply that it could not be delivered to Hazel Curtis. A little digging revealed that this was because she, too, had retired. Hazel was a Community Paediatrician in Exeter and provided input to what was the West of England School and College for Children and Young People with Little or no Sight. (I hope that is the correct title.) This has now been re-branded as the WESC Foundation. Hazel had a keen interest in children and young people with both visual impairment and autism. She and Heather Macleod (then speech and language therapist at the West of England) gave an excellent joint presentation to the conference in November 2010 arranged by the Visual Impairment and Autism Project team. The presentation’s title was “Multidisciplinary assessment and intervention – how and why”.

I am sure those of you who know of Hazel’s work in the field will join me in wishing her a long, happy and healthy retirement.

Unfortunately, as noted above, the email address I have for Hazel is invalid, and I have not been able to identify another method of contacting her. Therefore, Hazel is unlikely to read this. If you are in touch with Hazel, please do pass this newsletter on to her.
Children who have autism and who also have visual impairment

This item is substantially the same as one included in the July newsletter.

Most of you will know of the guidance material developed by the team involved in the Visual Impairment and Autism Project. This is now available at www.rnib.org.uk/autism. The vast majority of the children and young people for whom this material is intended are those whose “primary” disability is visual impairment and who also have (or could have) a diagnosis of autism. The team involved in the Project recognised that there are also children and young people whose “primary” disability is autism and who also have visual impairment. These two groups may have some needs in common, but it is also likely that there are strategies which are unique to the two groups.

I have recently received enquiries concerning children and young people whose primary disability is autism and who also have visual impairment. In addition, I am now in touch with Louise Stalker, an optometrist, who is conducting a grounded theory study of the experience of the primary eye-care of autistic children. Louise would be grateful to hear from anyone carrying out similar qualitative research. If you are involved in such research, please let me know so I can put you in touch with Louise. If you know of someone else who is involved in such research, please ask them to contact me so I link that person with Louise. (Contact details are provided at the end of this newsletter.)

It is, perhaps, no surprise that one of the issues for autistic children is the sight test. For many of them, this is a major challenge. In fact, I am now aware of an autistic pupil who needed a carefully structured programme to enable him to have a sight test. This programme lasted about 18 months.

Another difficulty for practitioners is that of providing information to the autistic child about his / her vision, especially when this concerns a progressive sight loss.

It occurs to me that there may be a need for a project investigating the needs of children and young people whose primary disability is autism and who also have visual impairment. Such a project could develop guidance material to parallel that now available for children and young people whose primary disability is visual impairment and who also have autism.
This is only a very embryonic idea at present. Such a project would need to be funded and would require a team of people with a range of expertise.

I would very much like to hear from practitioners who work with children and young people whose primary disability is autism and who also have visual impairment. For example, please let me know if you

• feel there is a need for such a project
• have been unable to obtain advice about a pupil
• have developed your own strategies for pupils
• you would like to be involved in such a project.

Please pass on this Newsletter
If you know of anyone who does not receive this newsletter, but who is interested in visual impairment and autism, please do pass the 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 me – contact details follow.

Contact details
These follow on the next page.
Contact details
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
  WV8 1QH
  UK

Retaining your details for emailing
If you do not wish me to retain your name and email address, please email
(address above) and ask to have your details removed. But, please note: if I
do not have your details, I will be unable to send any further newsletters or
other up-dates.

This newsletter was written and distributed by Ian Bell, Specialist
Independent Speech and Language Therapist; Formerly Project Leader,
Visual Impairment and Autism Project (September 2008 to March 2011)

Email: vi-autism.medina@tiscali.co.uk
Website: http://ianpbell.com/
Visual impairment and autism page:
http://ianpbell.com/visual-impairment-autism/