



## Quarterly Newsletter of Autism Research – October 2017

### Welcome

It's been a rather sodden winter across the country; we hope you've taken what opportunities you could to get out and about to share some time with family and friends.

Roll on the warmer months!

### From The Chairperson

What a busy part of the year the Minds for Minds Network has had. It was wonderful to see Jessie was presenting in Queenstown and also to learn of the successful application for funding from the Cure Kids Fund. Both of these initiatives support the work of our dedicated scientists to continue to undergo further research in ASD.



Josephine Wallis  
Minds for Minds  
Chairperson

The Trust is busy looking to organise another event this year and exploring other ways of fundraising for this essential research work.

As always we need your ongoing support and if you or anyone is interested in either being part of the Minds for Minds Trust to help raise money for the Trust or you can directly provide some financial assistance then we would love to hear from you.

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## Minds for Minds Research and Clinical Update on Autism Spectrum Disorder

Back in May around 150 people shared an evening with Minds for Minds at the University of Auckland's Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences to hear from the team and our three young researchers on their research to date.

The topics and speakers were as follows:

**Dr Juliette Cheyne, Research Fellow, Synaptic Function & Auditory Neurobiology**

**Topic:** Understanding the structure and connections in brains of people with autism.

**Giselle Wong, MSc Student**

**Topic:** Gut microbiome – bacteria present in the gut of a mouse model of ASD & the role these microorganisms may play in autism.

**Brendan Swan, PhD Student**

**Topic:** Minds for Minds research registry database as a research tool and the demographic and diagnostic findings

For those unable to join us that evening, the presentations are now available here:

<http://www.mindsforminds.org.nz/research-update-videos/>

We would like to thank the Centre for Brain Research for helping us host this event.

## Guest Speaker In Queenstown

Recently our lead researcher, Dr Jessie Jacobsen, presented at the Australasian Winter Conference on Brain Research in Queenstown.



Johanna Montgomery Neurophysiologist, and Associate Professor, and colleague in the Minds for Minds network, chaired the session.

Jessie discussed some of the research the Genetics Group has been conducting using whole genome sequencing (all of the coding and non-coding regions of an individual's DNA) and presented three families for which unique causative variations have been identified.

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## The Children's Autism Foundation

The Foundation is hosting a variety of workshops between now and Christmas. Sessions are free for families and carers who register and the charge varies for professionals.

### Workshops

**Everyday Transition Workshop** – Helping Your Child Through a Tricky Transition Period  
Tuesday 19 September, 7 - 9pm, Onepoto Domain Community Hall, Puawai Place, Northcote, Auckland.

**Strategies for Behaviour** – Strategies To Help Address Behaviours To Creative Positive Behaviour Change

Tuesday 24 October, 7 - 9pm, Taitamariki Guide Centre, 8 Auburn St, Takapuna, Auckland.

**Hands On Autism** – Understanding Autism, Behaviour Strategies, Sensory Issues and Dealing With Anxiety

Saturday 4 November, 9am-4pm, Manurewa

**Dealing with Anxiety** – An interactive workshop exploring the impact of anxiety on those with autism.

Wednesday 22 November, 7-9pm, YES Disability, 3 William Laurie Place, Albany, Auckland

To find out more information, costs or to register, visit: [www.autism.org.nz](http://www.autism.org.nz)



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## Additions To The Gene Team!



Two Masters students have joined the Minds for Minds research team under the skilled supervision of Dr Jessie Jacobsen and Associate Professor Klaus Lehnert.

**Lydia Velzian** began her university experience pursuing a biochemistry degree whilst playing field hockey in the United States. Eighteen months later, her hockey commitments brought her home to a Bachelor of Science and with a major in biomedical science at Auckland the University of Auckland.

Exploring how the human body is able to function has fascinated her since childhood and cultivated her interest in genetics and neuroscience. She looks forward to playing her part in discovering and understanding more in these fields.



**Chris Samson** has been hooked on genetics since high school and has been absorbed by how small changes in DNA can have such big impacts. During his studies at The University of Auckland he's furthered his passion for genetics and the wonderful

world of molecular biology. He's keen to further his knowledge in genetic changes and how it can be used to improve lives.

Welcome to the team!

## Cure Kids Funding

Minds for Minds scientists have been awarded a grant of \$343,614 for their focus and commitment to research into the genetics of autism spectrum disorder. Cure Kids and A Better Start partner with The National Science Challenge fund high quality research focused on child and youth wellbeing; one specific area being ASD and the team genome sequencing.

This grant will enable the research team to develop cost-effective protocols to genetically screen children with confirmed ASD, and transfer this approach into clinical practice in New Zealand. In addition, it is predicted the testing during the project will return a genetic diagnosis for around 30-90 of the 300 children. This will enable more targeted interventions and improved management for them.

With the funding, the research team will also include a large number of Maori and Pacific Island families who have been previously underserved in international ASD-related research. The advances brought about by cost-effective sequencing of genes offers a great opportunity to improve our understanding of ASD in New Zealand and ultimately improve the lives of those children affected.

## Minds For Minds T-Shirts



Josephine Wallis and her son Michael model the T-Shirts

Ken Griffen is a young New Zealand artist, based in New York and has had sold out exhibitions locally. He has created an exclusive image for Minds for Minds for a limited edition of signed T-shirts to raise funds for the autism research project.

Ken was originally Creative Director for Huffer Brand. As one commentator said of his art "I have not been to an exhibition or come across a new artist that has made me this excited in a very long time." Visit [www.kengriffen.com](http://www.kengriffen.com) to see more of his works.

**There are only 250 T-shirts made; there are still some available with his signature on the sleeve.**

All T-shirts are \$50. Colours: black image on white T-shirt and white "on black. There are a number of sizes in mens, womens and youth/kids.

All proceeds go direct to the Minds for Minds Autism Research project.

**Click on the link to order:**  
[www.mindsforminds.org.nz/shop](http://www.mindsforminds.org.nz/shop)

## Speaking Circuit

Remember if you would like any one of our scientific team to speak to your group or conference about Minds for Minds and its research, please email us at [info@mindsforminds.org.nz](mailto:info@mindsforminds.org.nz)



Dr. Jessie Jacobsen and Professor Russell Snell

## Keep In Touch

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## Help us continue our research

[www.mindsforminds.org.nz/donate](http://www.mindsforminds.org.nz/donate)

## Call for Research Participants

Neurobiological Factors in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Taxonomy

### What is involved?

- Healthy individuals aged 16 or older can take part.
- Participants will be asked to attend a single one-hour session at the University of Auckland EEG Lab.
- You will be presented with neuropsychological tests to complete while your brain activity is recorded using a non-invasive technique (electroencephalography / EEG).
- All participants will be provided a brief report and have the opportunity to see their own brain's electrical activity in real time.
- Formal reports at reduced costs will also be made available to all participants.

### Why is this research important?

It is hoped the research will enhance our understanding of ASD taxonomy so that we are better able to diagnose ASD.

### Interested?

Please contact Stephen Wolfson for further information:

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- Phone: (09) 3737599 ext 86421