



Quarterly Newsletter  
April 2018

## Welcome From Our Chairperson Josephine Wallis

Already the first quarter of the year has gone. In this newsletter, we hear about the success of one of our PhD students and learn more about some of the great overseas collaborations that are being undertaken.

We also welcome on board our new Event Coordinator, Sandy Fraser, who began work with us on the 5<sup>th</sup> of April. Sandy comes from a strong marketing and advertising background, and will be working with our fundraising committee to increase some of the Trust's activities with the aim of attracting greater funding to support our programmes.

Best Wishes everyone,  
Josephine Wallis



Josephine Wallis  
Minds for Minds Chairperson

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## Recognising Excellence

### School of Biological Sciences Postgraduate Research Award

Congratulations to Whitney Whitford, a PhD student with the Minds for Minds genetics team. Whitney was recently awarded the Auckland University School of Biological Sciences Postgraduate Research Award.

It recognised the recent publication in an international journal of her research "**Compound heterozygous SLC19A3 mutations further refine the critical promoter region for biotin-thiamine responsive basal ganglia disease**" Whitney was lead author, supported by other Minds for Minds researchers as co-authors.



Whitney presenting her research at the 2018 School of Biological Sciences Research Awards.  
Photo: Charlotte Johnson

[This publication](#) involved the identification of two separate genetic variations in the same gene in a brother and sister, including one copy number variant, is the focus of Whitney's research. The result led to a life-saving treatment for the family.

It is pleasing to see the great work of Minds for Minds being recognised by the wider research community and the research our students are performing is being celebrated.

[Click here to read the online journal publication](#)

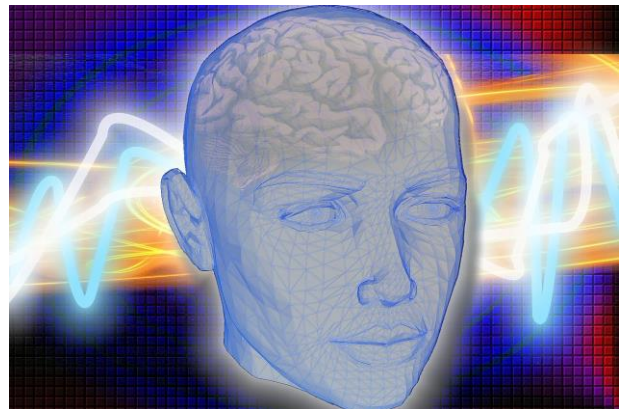
## Hands Across The Water! A Trans-Tasman Collaboration

Dr Joan Leung has worked with the University of Melbourne to develop a new clinical research model. The collaboration struck between the two parties explores the connection between auditory processing and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).



Recent research has consistently shown that greater than 50% of children with ASD perform speech perception-in-noise tasks poorly compared to their peers. The speech-in-noise difficulties observed in these children can be severe enough to exacerbate the communication challenges central to this disorder. Recent studies have shown the use of wireless listening devices can significantly improve speech perception in the classroom, allow students to communicate with each other more easily, and improve both general engagement and educational outcomes.

The Speech and Hearing team including Minds for Minds researchers here at the University of Auckland had the pleasure of welcoming Philippa James, an Audiologist for ASD at the University of Melbourne, during her visit in mid-February this year. Philippa is collaborating with the hearing technology company Phonak to translate her research into clinical practice whilst building awareness of these findings to colleagues, other health professionals, and the broader ASD community.



An intimate group of researchers, Phonak audiologists and speech language therapists, got together to hear Philippa talk about her work in Melbourne and participated in an engaging discussion about the development of her assessment protocol and where this work could lead. Ideas on how to potentially incorporate a research arm into this clinical model were also discussed. A collaborative effort between Melbourne and Auckland is now in the works. The NZ team are looking at participating in the development and refinement of the audiologic assessment protocol, and to find out how it ties in with language development and other psychosocial domains like social interaction, well-being, and anxiety. Watch this space for more exciting developments!



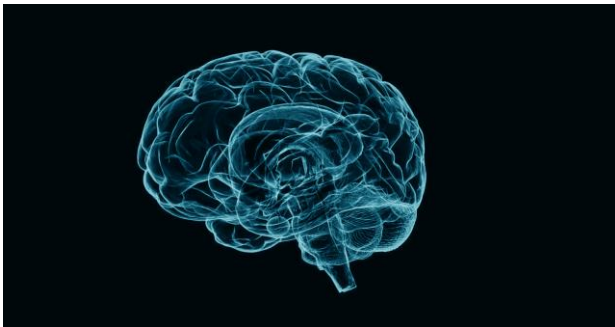
Joan Leung and Philippa James

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## Participants Sought For Research Project

Ozge Karakale is a psychology student working towards a PhD at Auckland University under the supervision of Professor Ian Kirk and Associate Professor Karen Waldie, both of them are members of the Minds for Minds team. If you are aged 18-45 and have never had a major head injury, she would welcome your participation in her research.

She is looking for people with and without an Autism Spectrum Disorder (including Asperger's) diagnosis to investigate the relationship between emotional processing, autistic traits and the brain responses to social information. Participation requires only one 2 hour session at the University's Science Centre on the main campus.



You'll be asked to complete a computerised task followed by two self-report questionnaires, one on autism and one on empathy. During the computerised task you will watch a series of face images on a screen while your neurophysiological responses are being recorded via electroencephalography (EEG) electrodes attached to your scalp; EEG is completely safe and painless. EEG only records the naturally occurring brain activity; there is no electricity running through the EEG net. All data collected will be completely anonymous. As a thank you, you will be given a \$20 Countdown voucher.

If you'd like to help Ozge out or wish to find out more about the research you can contact her via email: [okar164@aucklanduni.ac.nz](mailto:okar164@aucklanduni.ac.nz)

**Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics committee on 19/12/2016 for three years. Reference number: 018461**

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## Minds For Minds T-Shirts For Sale



Josephine Wallis & son Michael with t-shirts

Ken Griffen is a young New Zealand artist, based in New York and has had sold out exhibitions locally. He has gifted an exclusive limited-edition design for 250 Minds for Minds 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." to see his works visit [www.kengriffen.com](http://www.kengriffen.com). There were only 250 t-shirts produced and there are still some available in a limited size range for adults with his signature on the sleeve. Plenty of children's sizes 8-14 in white only. All t-shirts are \$50; colours are black on white and white on black. All proceeds go directly to the Minds for Minds autism research project.

**To order a t-shirt click here:**

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**Help us continue our research**

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

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## 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)