



HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR
MINISTRY OF EQUALITY, SOCIAL SERVICES & THE ELDERLY
14 GOVERNOR'S PARADE
GIBRALTAR

PRESS RELEASE

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World Autism Awareness Day

"Do not fear people with Autism, embrace them. Do not spite people with Autism unite them. Do not deny people with Autism, accept them, for then their abilities will shine" - Paul Isaacs

A message from Samantha Sacramento, Minister with responsibility for people with disabilities:

The Ministry of Equality, Social Services and the Elderly is working to improve the quality of care and standards for all children, young people and adults with disabilities, including autism. With the aim of removing the many myths surrounding autism we have provided training for staff working with people with this condition across Gibraltar. In March 2013, a one day conference was organised by the Ministry but delivered by the British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD). Over 140 Care Agency staff members from the learning disability service and the Children's and Families and Adult departments of Social Services attended as well as 90 colleagues from other Government departments including the Department of Education.

In November 2013, we offered training on Understanding Learning Disabilities, also delivered by BILD. This was attended by staff from the Care Agency and was again opened up to other Government departments including the Department of Education, the Royal Gibraltar Police, and the Gibraltar Sports and Leisure Authority. In addition, autism is now incorporated into the core training programme for all Care Agency staff.

There is one thing that people with ASD want and need and that is greater awareness. We want people to understand autism and to accept people with autism as they are. People with autism and their families strive for a greater understanding. We therefore understand that training and raising awareness are key.

Gibraltar's Government is committed to Equality. At the Care Agency, as a specific provider of a disability service at St Bernadette's Resource Centre and Dr Giraldo Home and at Social Services, we are continuously striving to improve. Through my Ministry for Equality, we are able to focus on issues of disability and more importantly accessibility and co-ordinate these through other Government departments

Today, in order to raise awareness of Autism we will provide an information desk between 7pm and 8pm at the Parliament lobby and, as many countries around the world, we will illuminate an iconic building in blue. 15 year old Andrew Lane will be pressing the switch to light up the Parliament building. Andrew was diagnosed with autism at an early age. He is passionate about movies and is extremely knowledgeable about directors and actors. He also enjoys current affairs and is an avid follower of world news.

We are now working with the newly formed charity Autism Support Gibraltar. Given this Government's open door policy, the charity is already working with the Minister for Health on various initiatives. I have met with them recently and am looking forward to working together and supporting them as a group

Ends

Notes to Editors

Autism (or Autism Spectrum Disorder [ASD] as it is commonly known) varies from person to person and it can range from mild to severe. It is a spectrum condition, which means that, while all people with autism share certain difficulties, their condition will affect them in different ways. Some people with autism are able to live relatively independent lives but others may have accompanying learning disabilities and need a lifetime of specialist support. People with autism may also experience over or under-sensitivity to sounds, touch, tastes, smells, light and colours.

It is also common for people with ASD to have symptoms or aspects of other conditions such as:

- attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD),
- mental health problems such as depression and anxiety,
- comorbid medical problems, such as gastrointestinal disorders and epilepsy
- dyspraxia (developmental co-ordination disorder).

Myths about autism

1. People with autism don't want friends. If someone has autism, they may struggle with social skills, which may make it difficult to interact with others. They

might seem shy or unfriendly, but that's just because they are unable communicate their desire for relationships the same way you do.

2. People with autism can't feel or express any emotion—happy or sad. Autism doesn't make an individual unable to feel the emotions you feel, it just makes the person communicate emotions (and perceive your expressions) in different ways.

3. People with autism can't understand the emotions of others. Autism often affects an individual's ability to understand unspoken interpersonal communication, so someone with autism might not detect sadness based solely on one's body language or sarcasm in one's tone of voice. But, when emotions are communicated more directly, people with autism are much more likely to feel empathy and compassion for others.

4. People with autism are intellectually disabled. Often, at times, autism brings with it just as many exceptional abilities as limitations. Many people with autism have normal to high IQs and some may excel at mathematics, music or another pursuit.

5. People with autism are just like Dustin Hoffman's character in Rain Man. Autism is a spectrum disorder, meaning its characteristics vary significantly from person to person. Knowing one person with autism means just that—knowing one person with autism. His or her capabilities and limitations are no indication of the capabilities and limitations of another person with autism.

6. People who display qualities that may be typical of a person with autism are just odd and will grow out of it. Autism stems from biological conditions that affect brain development and, for many individuals, is a life-long condition.

7. People with autism will have autism forever. Recent research has shown that children with autism can make enough improvement after intensive early intervention to "test out" of the autism diagnosis. This is more evidence for the importance of addressing autism when the first signs appear.

8. Autism is just a brain disorder. Research has shown that many people with autism also have gastro-intestinal disorders, food sensitivities, and many allergies.

9. Autism is caused by bad parenting. In the 1950s, a theory called the "refrigerator mother hypothesis" arose suggesting that autism was caused by mothers who lacked emotional warmth. This has long been disproved.

10. The prevalence of autism has been steadily increasing for the last 40 years. The rate of autism has increased by 600% in the last 20 years. In 1975, an estimated 1 in 1,500 had autism. In 2009, an estimated 1 in 110 had an autism spectrum disorder.