

Down Syndrome Support group

JOIN the Toowoomba and District Down Syndrome Support Group when it hosts the Repertory Theatre's production of the thriller comedy *Twist* by Miles Tredinnick on June 20 at 7.30pm. Admission is \$15 which will include supper, tea, coffee and wine. For bookings call Pam on 0419 660 852.

Quota Club monthly meeting

THE monthly Quota Club meetings are held on the second Tuesday of the month at the meeting room at The Toowoomba Hospice in O'Quinn St. Meetings will begin at 6.30pm. This month's will be held on June 12. New members welcome. Call Margaret on 4636 4950 or Jeni on 4697 9240.

Educator brings hope to many parents 'Please understand'

PARENTING a child with Asperger's syndrome can be like fumbling around in the dark, a fact Asperger's educator Nelle Frances knows all too well.

Mrs Frances has a 22-year-old son called Sam who has struggled throughout his life to fit into a society that doesn't understand him.

She was in town last week giving desperate parents, teachers and teacher aides some insight into the world of Asperger's, particularly in relation to sensory overload.

There were parents with children who hurt themselves and their siblings, and parents with children who suffer uncontrollable reactions to everyday things.

And according to Mrs Frances, a big factor in these behaviours is sensory overload.

To a child with Asperger's, something as simple as asymmetrical patterns or the sound of the wind blowing can cause them to feel uncontrollably angry or upset.

“Nelle Frances

Part of my fight is to change public perceptions of people with Asperger's.

She likened the feeling to an everyday person sitting in a room full of people banging and crashing instruments.

Participant Kylie Davie said her 10-year-old son was diagnosed with Asperger's a year ago after seeing a huge array of general practitioners and specialists.

She said she knew there was something different about him by the time he was one year old because he couldn't stand the textures of solid food, had poor sleeping habits and struggled to understand social interaction.

But at every turn she was informed she was a bad parent and there was nothing wrong

with her child other than a lack of discipline.

Every year that went by saw fewer birthday party invites and more calls to school for behaviour problems.

She said in only one year since his diagnosis she had seen incredible improvements, and Mrs Frances said it was a common story.

“Part of my fight is to change public perceptions of people with Asperger's,” Mrs Frances said.

“Every time I do one of these workshops I am inundated with people who share the same stories of people calling them bad parents and doctors who don't want to listen

“I hear horror stories, like one day I heard about a teacher aide who grabbed a kid by the back of his neck and told the child she would have her son beat him up in the playground.”

For more information on Mrs Frances and her work with Asperger's see her website, aspergerchild.com.



HELPING HAND: Asperger's syndrome educator Nelle Frances (centre left) offers coping strategies to (from left) Kylie Davie, Rhonda McDade and Kristy Murphy at a Sensory Detective workshop.

PHOTO: MEGAN MASTERS

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