

minds for minds
Unlocking Autism Together

Quarterly Newsletter
July 2018

Welcome From Our Chairperson Josephine Gagan

Welcome to our winter newsletter; while it hasn't been too cold so far it has certainly made up for it with the wet! As you will see we have some exciting news about who has agreed to be part of the Trust and in this edition we are announcing one of our key fundraising initiatives for the year in September.

Best wishes everyone,
Josephine Gagan



Josephine Gagan
Minds for Minds Chairperson

Patron for Minds for Minds

We're delighted to announce former National Party Finance Minister the Hon Steven Joyce is taking on his first public role since leaving Parliament by accepting the role of patron for our Trust.

He's getting behind a cause with a very personal connection; his eight-year old son Tommy is on the autism spectrum. Mr Joyce is willing to help us raise awareness of the impact of autism on New Zealand families and of the need for ongoing research.

"I know the impact this can have on families and I also know that a better understanding of the condition will help solve some of the most critical challenges facing people all around the world. If I can support the work of the very talented geneticists as they work to better understand the condition, then I'll be putting my previous campaign management experience to very good use," said Mr Joyce.



Hon Steven Joyce

Welcome on board!

Genetics team wins the Centre for Brain Research Collaborative Science Prize

Dr Jessie Jacobsen, Professor Russell Snell and Associate Professor Klaus Lehnert were part of the Applied Translational Genetics group awarded the inaugural Centre for Brain Research 'Collaborative Science Prize'. The Rt. Hon. Dame Patsy Reddy, Governor-General, presented the award at the centre's 9th anniversary celebration held at St Matthew's-in-the City. The award recognises the team's relationships with clinicians, researchers and the community, who by working together, are providing important diagnostic answers for New Zealand families. More information about the Centre for Brain Research's 9th anniversary celebration can be found by [clicking here](#)



Photo Credit: The Centre for Brain Research
Left - Right: Professor Russell Snell, Professor Sir Richard Faull, Dr Pritika Narayan, Associate Professor Klaus Lehnert, Rt Hon Dame Patsy Reddy, Dr Jessie Jacobson

Save the Date

Everyone loves a quiz night, so please do join us for an evening of fun and trivia rivalry on **Wednesday 19th September**. We have great prizes for the top two teams plus fabulous items up for grabs in an auction, hosted by Shane Cortese. All proceeds go to support the very important research by our dedicated scientists. Early expressions of interest to reserve tables or anyone wishing gift auction items, please email sandy@mindsforminds.org.nz

Follow us on [Facebook](#) for more information.

Important research results for families funded by the IHC Foundation

The IHC Foundation generously supported research to facilitate the genetic diagnosis for families with rare, undiagnosed neuro-developmental disorders. The team used the latest genome sequencing technology to explore all possible answers. They were spectacularly successful, finding answers for 11 families (with 7 more still to be analysed). They identified a variety of different causative genetic variation, including large deletions of genomic material (much like deleting a paragraph or chapter of a book, which makes the story hard to follow) and single nucleotide changes which can result in a 'stop' codon (carrying on with the book analogy, it is like have 'the end' half way through a story). This has completed a diagnostic odyssey for these families and in some cases, provides the first step towards the development of potential therapies. More information about this project can be found on the [IHC Foundation's website](#)

Update from psychologist Associate Professor Karen Waldie and team: Exploring co-occurrence of ADHD and anxiety with ASD

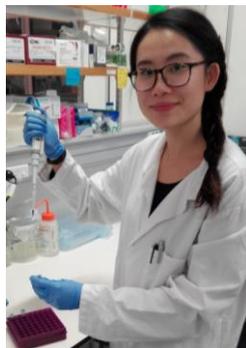
The rate of co-occurrence of ADHD and anxiety with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is high. PhD student, Ashleigh Saunders, along with her supervisor, Karen Waldie, examined the behavioural characteristics and brain activity ([Electroencephalography](#)) in individuals with ASD alone and with coexisting ADHD and anxiety. Three journal articles resulted from this research. They found brain oscillations and connectivity between the right and left hemispheres are different in anxiety, ADHD and ASD compared to when they co-occur. They also showed there is some similarities and differences in their behavioural characteristics. The findings support the idea ADHD and anxiety are additive. This means that even when they might occur together, they are a separated condition that required their own diagnosis and defining characteristics. The findings also have implications for healthcare practitioners and therapists in diagnosing and applying treatment. Click the links to read the research articles: [Article 1](#), [Article 2](#) & [Article 3](#)

Studying noise sensitivity in adults with ASD

Noise sensitivity and reactivity to environmental stimuli is commonly reported in individuals with autism. However, many reports are anecdotal and first-hand experiences of noise sensitivity in this group and are not typically detailed compared to other modalities. Our study used semi-structured interviews to capture auditory sensory experiences of adult individuals with autism and found themes that reflected their unique experiences and how these experiences impact their daily lives. Individuals with ASD tend to deal with noise sensitivity by avoiding or escaping the noise; our study highlights the need for coping strategies, as the noise sensitivity can exacerbate anxiety and social avoidance (both of which can be problematic in ASD). These first-hand accounts provide important insights for practitioners and clinicians alike and inform health and wellbeing policy. [Click here to view research article](#)

Mouse model in good hands

Giselle Wong has recently started her PhD working with Mike Taylor and Johanna Montgomery on the gut microbiome of a mouse model of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This research will continue the work started by Giselle last year in her MSc thesis.



Her thesis was highly rated by the examiners and Giselle's excellent grade was enough to secure her a University of Auckland Doctoral Scholarship. This mouse research, which has been supported by Minds for Minds and more recently a major grant from the Health Research Council, aims to investigate the role of dietary micronutrients in improving behavioural, neurological and gut issues in these mice. The use of animals such as mice in ASD research can lead to a better understanding of the mechanism(s) which underlie these issues and our ultimate aim is to be able to transfer such knowledge to humans.

Minds For Minds T-Shirts For Sale



Josephine Gagan & 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

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.

[Click here to order a t-shirt](#)

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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