


Daisy Chain
A haven for families affected by autism

Our Story...



About Daisy Chain...

Daisy Chain began life in 2003 as the dream of its founder, Lesley Hanson, whose son Jacob was diagnosed with autism at an early age.

Although Jacob's condition was not severe, Lesley soon became aware of the problems faced by the parents and carers of children who were on the autistic spectrum.

Lesley dreamed of a haven for children with autism; a place where they could go to experience something in life that would give them pleasure and was especially for them. The centre would include respite facilities, playroom, sensory areas, animal barn, agricultural and horticultural opportunities and nature trails. It would also provide parents, carers and siblings with support and a resource library.

Disgruntled with the lack of facilities and services available to support families, Lesley and husband Duane set off on a quest to make her dream become a reality. After extensive fundraising, the doors to Daisy Chain opened one year after her initial dream and it has continued to grow ever since.

Now, many years later, the charity provides a range of support services to children and adults affected by autism, either with a diagnosis or who are undergoing the diagnostic process, their parents/carers and their siblings.

We are continuing to develop our facilities & services all the time. Lesley died in 2004, but to ensure her dream still lives on, we need your help...



About Autism...

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), often referred to as autism, is a lifelong neuro-developmental disorder that affects the way a person communicates with and relates to other people. It also affects how they make sense of the world around them. Autism is a spectrum disorder meaning each individual will be affected in different ways across all abilities, strengths, difficulties and intelligence.

Although each individual is affected to varying degrees, they all share key areas of difference: social communication, social interaction, social imagination and sensory processing differences.

Often individuals go undiagnosed, sometimes even into adulthood, as those on the spectrum do not “look” disabled or different to their peers. Parents have said that family members or the public often say “your child is naughty” as the difficulties are not easy to see. Adults have also explained how they feel misunderstood.

What causes autism?

Research into autism is continuous, however the cause is still unknown. Everyone has their own genetic inheritance, personality and life experiences that shape who they are. Professionals have concluded that autism is a complex condition that children are born with that occurs as a result of possible genetic predisposition, environment and numerous other unknown factors.

What is known for certain is that autism is not caused by a person’s upbringing or their social circumstances, and is not the fault of the individual with the diagnosis or their parents.

Is there a cure?

Currently, there is no cure for autism. However, there are a range of interventions that enable learning and development - everyone with autism can benefit from a timely diagnosis and access to appropriate services and support.



Traits of Autism...

The traits of autism vary from one person to another, but those on the spectrum will have key areas of difference. These are social communication, social interaction, social imagination and sensory processing differences.

Social communication - people with autism can have differences with the use and interpretation of both verbal and non-verbal language. This can cause difficulties in expressing themselves and understanding the intended language of others. For example, people affected by autism may struggle with interpreting facial expressions, tone of voice, jokes, sarcasm and gestures.

Social interaction - socialising is a skill learnt in childhood but for individuals with autism, this is not a skill that comes naturally and often has to be taught. Difficulties in this area can include not knowing how to behave around other people, not understanding the unwritten rules of behaviour and finding it hard to initiate relationships. Together, these difficulties make it hard for someone on the spectrum to establish and keep friendships.

Social imagination - this allows us to understand and predict other people's behaviour, make sense of abstract ideas and to imagine situations outside of our daily routine. Difficulties in this area include inflexibility in thought and/or behaviour, a need for routines and finding it hard to imagine what may happen next (i.e. consequences to actions). Children may also have intense interests based around a certain object or subject.

Those on the spectrum often use "stimming" behaviour, which is short for self-stimulatory behaviour. Stimming behaviour usually refers to, but is not exhaustive of, hand-flapping, rocking, spinning, dancing, or repetition of words and phrases. Stimming behaviour is generally observed when an individual has an abundance of emotion and is trying to regulate themselves or seek sensory stimulation.



Sensory processing differences - what we see, hear, feel, smell and taste gives us information about our environment and ourselves. It helps us make sense of the world and enables us to act appropriately within it. It seems that many people with autism have sensory experiences that are heightened or reduced, causing them to have a unique perception of the world around them. In addition to the well-known five senses, those on the spectrum also struggle with balance, body awareness and awareness or understanding of what is happening internally (i.e. feeling poorly, hungry, hot/cold).

Additional diagnoses - some children may experience other difficulties as well as having autism, although this is not always the case. The most common additional diagnoses are: dyspraxia, dyslexia, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), tics, anxiety, depression, learning disabilities and epilepsy.

Possible observed behaviours...

- Rigid behaviour
- Literal thinking
- Toe walking
- Covering ears
- Repetitive language
- Under/over eating
- Stimming
- Inappropriate social responses
- Being withdrawn
- Resistance to being touched
- Delay in speech
- Clumsiness
- Intense interests
- Lack of eye contact

Some ASD strengths...

It is important to focus on the strengths of the individual as well as supporting with development in areas where they are less able. Although those on the spectrum face quite a few difficulties in life, they can contribute a lot to the world around them. Their strengths may include:

- attention to detail
- excellent memory and concentration
- honesty
- following rules
- fewer social inhibitions
- excellent organisational skills
- precision, accuracy and neatness
- highly specialised knowledge in a particular interest
- persistence and reliability
- a unique way of seeing the world





Autism myths...

- It is a middle class disorder
- It is due to bad parenting
- It is a mental health condition
- It is just an excuse or results from bad behaviour
- It always occurs with an area of genius
- It is another term for learning difficulties
- Once speech begins, other difficulties disappear
- Individuals have no empathy

Autism facts...

- It is a developmental disorder involving the brain
- It is a lifelong disability
- It can be genetic
- It is more commonly diagnosed in boys than girls
- It may be accompanied by other diagnoses
- Those affected may experience the world differently - be over/under sensitive to their environment

Imagine...

...you have just landed on another planet and you didn't know the inhabitants, their language, their customs, how they interact or how you should behave in their presence.

...trying to find your way around a foreign country with only jumbled signposts to follow and directions that you can only partially understand.

...not being able to talk, use your hands, use facial expressions or gestures and you had not been taught sign language.

...hearing ten T.V. sets all at once and not being able to tune into any of them.

For a person with autism, ordinary situations can feel just like this.

Chris Mitchell, June 2008

Our facilities...

Our facilities at our 5.5-acre site, Calf Fallow Farm in Norton allow us to offer a variety of services and activities to the families who visit us on a weekly basis.

Day Centre - our unique £1m day centre was opened in 2010, the first comprehensive support facility that provides holistic support to children with autism and their families in the UK. Facilities within the centre include a soft play area, sensory rooms, art and craft room and IT suite, as well as housing offices and meeting rooms.

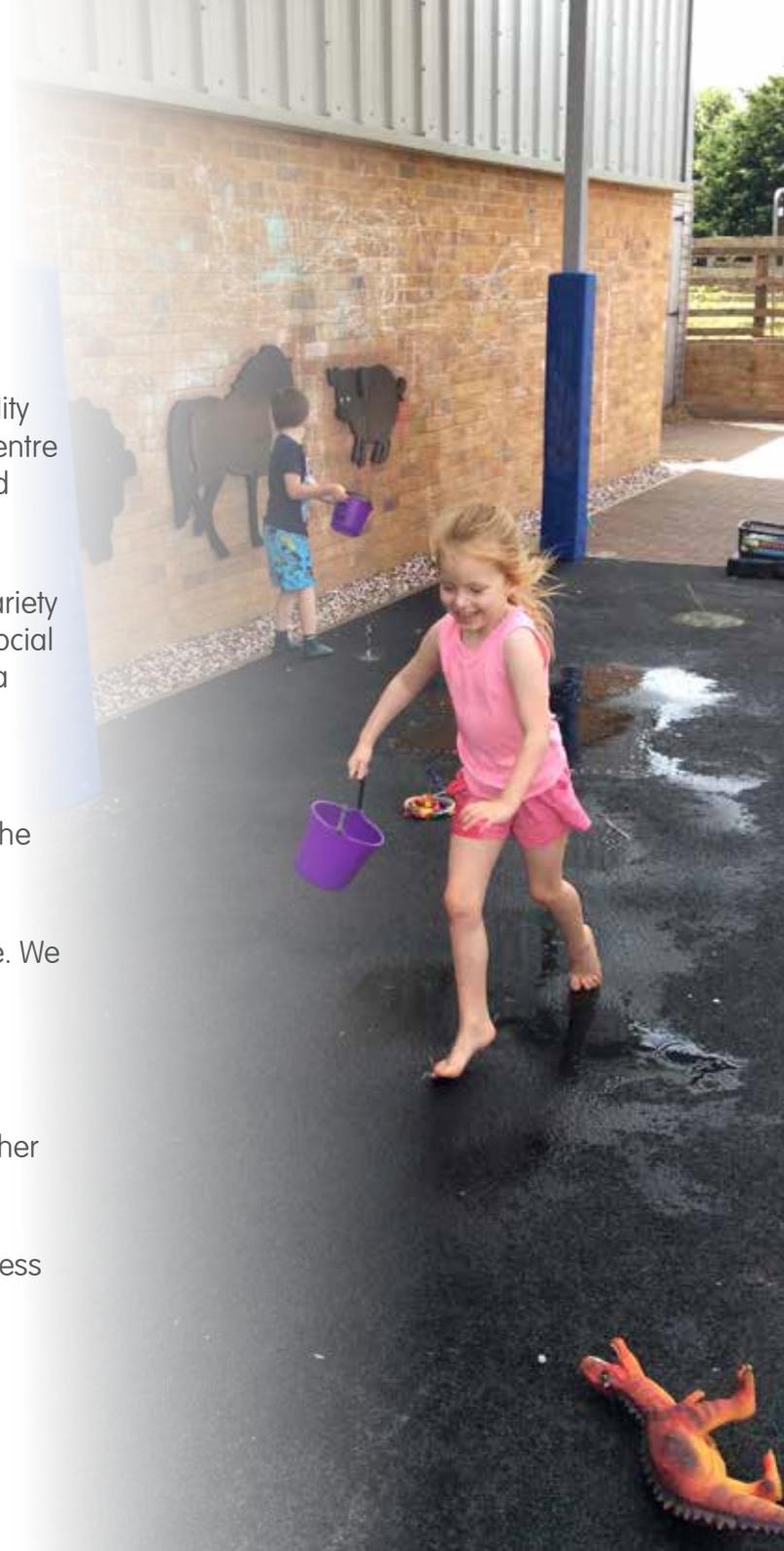
Farm - the Daisy Chain farm is a popular attraction for our children and families, and is home to a variety of animals for our children to interact with during activity days, one-to-one animal therapy sessions, social clubs and youth groups. We also offer animal care qualifications to our placement students, and run a sponsor an animal scheme to help raise funds to care for the animals.

Sensory Play Area - our redeveloped sensory play area was opened in 2016 and provides our children with an opportunity to experience a genuine sense of adventure within a safe environment. The area includes a sand play area, slides, pod swings and trampolines.

Wetlands - our fascinating wetland area provides a safe area for our children to learn about nature. We run a number of activities in our wetland area, including nature trails, bird watching, making wildlife homes and pond dipping.

Gardens and allotments - looked after by a team of dedicated volunteers, our allotment area provides our children with the opportunity to grow their own plants and produce, whilst working together to enhance their social interaction.

Superstore - our charity superstore on Portrack Lane in Stockton not only allows us to raise awareness and much needed funds, but also provides a base for our employability programme which supports young adults with autism in gaining qualifications in employability skills and obtaining valuable work experience on the shop floor and coffee shop.





Our services...

Activity Days

Our Saturday and High Need Activity Days welcome families affected by autism to come and enjoy our soft play, farm, sensory play area and lots of other indoor and outdoor activities, with the High Needs sessions adapted to accommodate specific needs. Available to children who have a diagnosis of autism or those undergoing the diagnostic process and their parents/carers and siblings.

Social Groups and Youth Clubs

We run a number of social clubs and youth groups for young people aged 5-17. The sessions are structured and provide opportunities for interactions and friendships between young people.

Adult Group

Our Adult Group is for young adults aged 18-30 with a diagnosis of autism. The group is relaxed and informal, meeting each Monday during term time with additional meetings over the school holidays. The group also go on planned outings of their choosing, such as bowling, visiting a local pub or visiting a theme park.

Toddler Group

Our toddler group is for children under 5 with any additional needs and their parents/carers. The group aims to bring families in similar situations together, allowing them to share experiences and interact whilst the children can have fun in the soft play area and enclosed outdoor area.

Training

We offer a range of autism awareness courses to parents/carers and family members of a child with autism, local businesses and service providers who wish to learn more about the condition, as well as the National Autistic Society's EarlyBird Plus and Teen Life programmes to help parents/carers to understand their child's autism and develop strategies to pre-empt problem behaviours and/or manage those which do occur.

Links

Our Links group is for parents/carers of children who have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or who have children going through the diagnostic process. The weekly programme is varied, with interesting speakers, workshops and an opportunity for an informal chat. We run a number of Links groups at various times - see our website for further details.

Sibz

Our Sibz group caters for siblings of children with an autism diagnosis and is suitable for young people aged between 8-16. They enjoy outings, activity evenings and occasional education sessions, which help the young people understand more about Autism Spectrum Disorders. Sibz also have the opportunity to attend an overnight residential trip and occasional day trips during the school holidays.

Holiday Activities

We run a variety of activities throughout the school holidays, including additional activity days, short break sessions, family day trips and soft play/messy play sessions.

Supported Work Placements

We have made strong community links with a variety of businesses and charities in the local area to enable us to offer our students a supported work placement in line with their interests, strengths and career goals. Adults with a diagnosis of autism are given the opportunity to experience working life and show potential employers the skills that someone with autism can bring to a workplace.

Employability Course

We run an employability programme to support young adults with a diagnosis of autism or those undergoing the diagnostic process in gaining qualifications in employability skills and obtaining valuable work experience in our Superstore on Portrack Lane. The course covers a range of topics and offers the students the opportunity to practice interview skills, take part in an enterprise project and build their C.V.

For full details of all our services, please see our Services Brochure



How you can help...

As a Regular Giver...

You can become a supporter of Daisy Chain by becoming a Regular Giver and for as little as £5 a month, you can support the vital work of Daisy Chain and help transform lives across the Tees Valley. By making a regular donation, you can help us to plan for the future by knowing that we will have a steady income stream that we can rely upon.

As a company...

You can become a Friend of Daisy Chain, which is an exciting network for companies and organisations who are supporting us with our vision. You can involve your staff in fundraising events, activities and volunteering days, which are great team-building opportunities, and raise your company profile through sponsorship.

As a Fundraiser...

You can support Daisy Chain by attending one of our events, taking part in charity runs or treks and challenges. You can even do your own thing, such as hosting a coffee morning, wine tasting, shaving your head, growing a zany moustache, jumping out of a plane or arranging your own dinner or ball - the possibilities are endless!



As a Volunteer...

Volunteers are required in all areas of our services including retail, children's activities, fundraising, gardening and animal care. We have volunteers who commit from once a day to once a year in a variety of roles to suit them and their individual situation. Whatever your skills, whatever you can offer - even if it's just your time - you can help us to make a difference!

Donate to our Superstore...

We accept a wide variety of donated items, from large items of furniture and dining room sets to smaller items like children's toys, books, bric a brac, jewellery and clothes - all of which can be sold at our Superstore on Portrack Lane to raise funds. Our Employability Students put their skills into practice at our store, and the presence in such a prominent position helps us massively to raise awareness of our cause.

Sponsor an Animal...

From only £5 a month, you can make a difference and help us care for our animals in our petting farm and to continue providing a unique learning opportunity for our children. Sponsorship of our animals also makes an excellent gift and we have many for you to choose from!

People's Postcode Lottery...

People's Postcode Lottery manages society lotteries, raising funds for charities and good causes like Daisy Chain. The support we receive from players of People's Postcode Lottery is phenomenal and also helps us increase awareness of our activities, enabling us to achieve much more than ever before.





For more information, contact us

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