

Network a place to turn for adults with Asperger's

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It's a disorder that can lead to social isolation, depression and withdrawal.

But for adults living with Asperger's syndrome -- a form of autism -- there are few support services available.

A.J. Mahari of Kitchener is hoping to change that with the creation of the Asperger's K-W Support Network.

"I just think there's such an awesome potential for us to get together and really positively influence each other's lives," said Mahari, who was diagnosed 10 years ago at the age of 40.

Asperger's syndrome -- named for the Austrian pediatrician who first described it in the 1940s -- differs from other autism spectrum disorders in that individuals generally don't experience delays in language or cognitive development.

Common Asperger's traits include challenges in social interaction and recognizing social cues, a narrow focus of interest, certain language or communication abnormalities and an adherence to repetitive and sometimes dysfunctional routines.



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A.J. Mahari of Kitchener is forming a support network for local adults with Asperger's syndrome.

"There can be this incredible intelligence and giftedness and incredible (social) cluelessness at the same time, and they can't ever be woven together," said Mahari, a freelance writer.

"When you're so strong in one area . . . it's so impacting to have this gaping weakness."

Asperger's syndrome tends to be more prevalent in males. None of these traits, however, are carved in stone.

“Asperger’s syndrome isn’t one person,” Mahari said. “Not everybody is the same.”

Given that social situations can produce great anxiety for those with Asperger’s, Mahari understands that attracting members to the support and activity group may be an uphill battle.

“The challenge I’m going to have with this group is huge.”

But Mahari feels the opportunity to connect and share stories will prove valuable.

“When you sit alone with Asperger’s -- and it’s easy to be alone with it -- when you experience only that, it really magnifies things.”

If people don’t feel comfortable meeting in a group, Mahari said the networking component -- putting people in touch with one another -- could be helpful.

She also hopes to reach out to parents of children and teenagers with Asperger’s before they fall into what Mahari calls the “abyss” that adults with the syndrome face.

People with Asperger’s may retreat to a lonely, isolated world in response to judgmental reactions from so-called “neuro-typical” people in society.

“There really is no normal but there is the majority,” Mahari said. “I never fit in that box, and frankly I don’t want to.”

Mahari is trying to spread the word about the group during April, which is Autism Awareness Month, with the hope of holding the first meeting in May.

For more information about the support network, visit www.aspergerskw.ca.

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